A Mystery Story for Girls

THE GYPSY SHAWL

ROY J. SNELL

Jean Skelter

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By

ROY J. SNELL

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THE GYPSY SHAWL

CHAPTER I

THE IRON HAT

A STRONG, broad-shouldered, red-cheeked American girl walked down a dark and narrow road in the hill lands of France. The forest about her was black with approaching night. The shadows of great, deep rolling clouds passed before her. She shuddered from the feeling of darkness and gloom that came upon her. She hesitated to press on. Yet necessity urged her forward. She must find some dry dead branches for their evening campfire. In France, where there are so many poor, it is not easy to find dry wood for the taking, even in the heart of a great forest preserve.

Suddenly the girl, whose name was Florence

Huyler, stopped. She stood quite still, listening. Had she caught some strange sound from behind the brush at the right of the road? It seemed to her that she had; yet now as she stood there listening there came to her only the rush of the wind through the tree tops.

There was something quite wild and terrible about the rushing of that wind.

"It seems to murmur and shout," she told herself. "It seems to tell of days that are gone, and of men whose faces will be seen no more, of boys and men, our boys and men who in the midst of bursting shells and rattling machine gun fire fell face forward on this very sod."

Once more, haunted by all these thoughts, she started forward. And then again she seemed to catch a sound of movement in the brush.

This time she did not pause. "If it is anyone," she told herself, "they mean no harm. The poor peasants in this land are the kindliest folk the world has ever known."

She had gone a hundred paces forward, pausing here and there to pick up a stray bit of dry brush, when a low exclamation escaped her lips.

Bending forward, she pushed away the brush that half hid a beautiful cluster of tiny flowers, the first of a belated spring.

"Oh, you beauties!" she cried. "A cluster of stars from Heaven, touched with pink and purple of a sunset. I'll take you with me." She put out a hand to pick them. Just in time she noted that only half of the cluster was in bloom.

"I know," she said. "I'll take you along, roots and all. I'll put you in a box and fasten you on the shelf at the back of the cart. There you may nod at scores of smiling faces in the days to come. 'Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,'" she quoted, "'and waste its fragrance on the desert air; Full many a pearl—'"

She broke short off. What was this? She had thrust the edge of her hatchet in the earth beside the flowering plant and had struck something that gave forth a dull metallic sound.

Quickly brushing aside the dry leaves, she looked, then caught a tight breath. The thing she had unearthed was an iron hat, or steel helmet, such as American soldier boys wore more than ten years ago in the Great War. It was turned

upside down and filled with earth. In this hat the first blossoms of spring had found root and were now blooming.

As she caught sight of the steel helmet the whole nature of that forest seemed to change. The silence that had been there was broken by the crash of shell fire and the boom of cannon. Machine guns sounded their rat-tat-tat and rifle balls sang. In the midst of it all she seemed to see boys, bright-faced American boys, struggling forward, a thin determined line ever pressing onward toward victory or death.

"The boys!" she cried. "Our own American boys! And this hat belonged to one of these."

The sound of her own voice dispelled the dream. She knew once more that she stood in a silent forest and that wild flowers growing in a steel helmet bloomed before her.

"I will take you with me." There was a touch of reverence in her tone. "Did ever flower bloom in such a sacred urn?"

Leaving her strange treasure beside the road, she hastily gathered a few dead branches. These she placed with the others in a pile, and binding

them together with a piece of small rope, slung them over her shoulder. Then she retraced her steps to the place where the iron hat rested.

"Now," she sighed. "Now for camp, a cozy fire and a cup of tea with friends. Boo! How cold and cheerless this forest is! What must it have been when the boys in khaki went over the top at zero hour."

She tried to picture it all. But even the pictures she was able to conjure up were too much for her. So, shaking herself free from gloomy thoughts, she went on her way toward the camp. At a sudden turn in the narrow road she came to a dead halt to stare straight ahead.

There, close beside the road, not twenty paces before her, was a crimson patch.

"It's a garment," she told herself, "a dress, a coat or perhaps a shawl. But how could it have come there?"

This indeed was the question. She had met no one on this lonely road. No one had passed her. It certainly had not been there when she passed along half an hour before.

"But now there it is," she murmured.

Then a thought struck her all of a heap. "That," she told herself, "is the very place I paused to listen, where I thought I heard a sound in the brush."

"I wonder," she said with a sharp intake of breath, "if it could be some sort of a trap, a plot?"

Almost at once the thing seemed absurd. They were but three, two girls and a middle-aged woman, camping by the roadside. They carried almost no money. Their journey was not a long one. They had paid for the things they bought at village shops with travelers' checks. That had taken about all they had with them. In all France they had not a single enemy, nor for that matter, being strangers, did they have any friends, excepting Madame Strossor.

Curiosity overcoming her fears, she marched boldly forward.

The crimson patch turned out to be a shawl. But such a shawl!

No ordinary shawl was this. Woven of finest wool, and of a pattern such as is rarely seen these days outside a museum, it was a thing to marvel at.

She caught her breath as she touched it, lifted it, turned it over.

"Who can have lost so priceless a thing?" she said to herself in some amazement.

As she continued to examine the unique trophy of other days, her wonder grew. Not one square foot of this ample shawl was like any other.

"Pictures," she said to herself, looking closely at the design. "That's what they are, pictures woven in cloth."

Such exquisite pictures as they were, too! Here a tiny peasant cottage half hidden by apple trees; here a bit of calm sea where two white sails flapped in the breeze; and there a gypsy wagon and the smoke of a campfire curling lazily skyward. Such were the pictures woven in the shawl by a master hand.

"I will take it to our camp," she said as she folded it carefully. "I will ask Madame what we shall do about it."

There is little need to say that the remainder of her journey to camp was accomplished in record-breaking time. She had not stolen the shawl, did not intend to keep it. Quite the con-

trary, she intended to return it to the rightful owner as speedily as possible. For all that, the dark rolling clouds, the falling night, the battle field and the strange circumstances under which she had come into possession of the shawl, so played upon her nerves that she found herself expecting at any moment to be leaped upon by some strange apparition from out the gloomy shadows.

Florence left the showing of her new found treasures until tea and biscuits with wild honey and boiled rice had been disposed of and the fire was burned down to a gentle glow.

When she brought forward the iron hat filled with blooming flowers, Madame went suddenly silent. She touched the tiny bits of color as if they were tokens offered by a dying hand. Madame had lost her only brother in that great and terrible World War.

But the shawl, that was different.

"Why child!" she cried. "Do you not know? It is possible that you could not know that this is a gypsy shawl? And do you not know that nothing but ill fortune can come to one who so

much as touches a single object belonging to the gypsies?"

"But Madame," Florence remonstrated, "it is such a marvelous shawl. And it has been lost. Else how would it be lying in the road?"

"It does not matter. You should have left it to lie there." Madame's mind could not be moved.

She did come to the point at last when she examined and admired some of the figures.

"It is very old, that shawl," she said. "My mother has told me once of a band of gypsies who were famous weavers by hand. I think that band is all dead now. Anyway, the gypsies weave no more shawls. They make baskets and tell fortunes that are all great lies. They beg bread and steal chickens. Ah yes, mademoiselle, it is not ever good to have anything to do with the gypsies."

"But we are living like the gypsies," Florence smiled. "We should have a comradely feeling for them."

"At least," said Madame with a fine toss of the head, "we do not beg bread nor steal chickens."

The end of it all was that Florence folded up

the shawl with the firmly formed intention of keeping it until the rightful owner could be found.

She went to bed that night with the precious heirloom lying close beside her. Her last waking thought was of the shawl and its owner.

"I wonder," she mused dreamily, "if I will ever meet the owner of that shawl."

Not being able to look into the future, she went to sleep with the question unanswered.

The night was unusually cold. Florence had been sleeping for some time when she awoke and, feeling the chill of the night creeping in about her, put out a hand to tuck in the covers.

The next instant she sat up in the strange bed to peer into the shadows.

"The shawl!" she said in a low, tense whisper. "The gypsy shawl! It is gone!"

There could be no denying the fact. After feeling about over the ample bed, she found no trace of it.

"Who could have taken it?" she asked herself as a chill ran up her spine. "The gypsies? The gypsy girl to whom it belonged? But if she knew I

had it, why did she not come and ask for it, instead of prowling about our camp in the night?"

Their camp. She smiled as she thought of it; a square, high-wheeled cart, a burned out campfire and a pony tethered near, that was all.

Yet they had taken great pleasure in their camping through France. It had been a strange fancy of an elderly lady, Mrs. Langford, that had brought them there. Mrs. Langford was rich. She frequently found girls who interested her. If they showed purpose, talent and a genuine interest in others, she helped them to study and travel. In this particular instance she had offered to send Florence and Betty, her pal, on a jaunt through France.

"But you must not see France as many Americans see it," she had insisted. "A flying train journey here; a cathedral there; a rocketing auto; a walled city; a beach at the south; a day or two in Paris. No! No! That is not the way! France is far too beautiful, too wonderful, her people too interesting for that. No!" She had risen to walk with nervous stride across the great living room of her palatial home. "You must not

see France in that way. You must come to know the humble people, the villages, those quaint French villages first. Madame Strossor will accompany you," she had said. "France was her childhood home. She knows it well. She will find you a home which must be the abiding place of your trunk, little more. From this spot you must travel everywhere in a high, two-wheeled cart, a regular peasant's cart. And what is more," she had paused to look the girls squarely in the eyes, "you must be prepared to cook your supper by the roadside and to sleep in your cart beneath the stars. See the land as the gypsy sees it. That, indeed, is the way to see any land."

"And here we are sleeping in our cart," Florence told herself as her eyes took in the shadowy blanketed figures of her slim, dark-eyed pal, Betty, and of Madame Strossor.

"Wonder if I should waken them and tell them of the shawl?" she said to herself. "If I do, Madame will remind me that she warned me. And yet," she mused, "gypsies about. Who wants to sleep here unguarded?"

For some time she sat there undecided. In

the end, as the chill night wind crept through her heavy dream robe, she sank back and snuggled deep among the covers.

"Be a shame to waken them," she thought. "And after all, gypsies are only folks like ourselves. Much that is said of them is not true."

"Nothing ever truly happens by chance," she thought dreamily after a time. "Providence cares for all. That shawl came into my possession for a purpose. Wonder what the purpose can be?"

CHAPTER II

THE STATUE OF GOLD

THE MORNING following the disappearance of the gypsy shawl dawned bright and fair. Florence had started out for a good hike fifteen minutes before Betty and Madame Strossor were to start with the cart. She found herself alone on a deserted woodland road when, upon rounding a curve, she came for a second time upon that crimson patch which was the gypsy shawl.

This time, instead of lying in the road, the shawl was moving forward on the shoulders of a slender girl who, to all appearances, was about Florence's own age.

"But she can't be a gypsy," Florence told herself with a start. "Her hair is flaxen, almost white. Who ever heard of a blonde gypsy?"

Since the girl, who was walking straight before her, did not look back, Florence had a splendid

opportunity for observing her. She found in her many contradictions. She was blonde, yet she wore the bright kerchief of a gypsy knotted over her head. Her dress was beyond question that of a gypsy.

"But she does not walk like a gypsy," Florence told herself, shaking her head. "The gypsies have a sort of gliding movement all their own. She walks as if her feet were once accustomed to city streets."

Just then, as if feeling the scrutiny of someone behind her, the girl turned her head and looked Florence over from head to foot. One good, square, scrutinizing look, and she turned to resume her walk, this time with quickening stride.

"She knows I had the shawl and that she had it retrieved without asking leave," Florence told herself. Of this she could not be sure.

"That girl," she thought, "has a lovely, rather appealing face. And sad; such a sad face." She wondered vaguely whether she had ever seen a sad gypsy. She did not think she had.

The blonde girl has passed around a second

narrow curve in the road. Florence was thinking seriously of sitting down by the roadside and waiting for Madame and Betty to come up in the cart when she caught some strange sounds from before her in the road.

With one instinctive movement she bounded forward round the bend in the road to find herself face to face with one of life's tragedies, a weak person struggling gamely but vainly in the clutches of one much older and stronger than herself. The blonde girl was struggling to free herself from a very dark and evil-looking gypsy woman. The reason for the struggle was at once apparent. The woman was attempting to drag the shawl from the girl's slender shoulders.

Inspired alone by those school-day impulses that in her childhood had resulted so often in bruised shins and tangled hair, Florence entered the combat. She did not think "This is my duty," or "This is none of my affair." She did not think at all. She sprang at the dark gypsy and seizing her by the shoulder, spun her squarely about.

For a matter of ten seconds the woman stood staring at her in blank astonishment. Then, as

the purple mounted to her very ears, she launched herself at Florence, teeth, claws and nails.

Florence was large, but she was quick. She leaped aside. The charging woman stumbled forward, clawing the bushes.

There followed another ten seconds of inaction in which the blonde girl and the crimson shawl disappeared into the brush.

Once more the gypsy woman, who had been bending down, stood up to turn upon Florence. This time her hands were held high, as if for a blow.

Florence stood her ground. She did not fear fists. Teeth and claws were new to her. Not so new as the weapon she now faced. Too late, in sheer horror she saw clasped in the woman's hand a long-bladed knife.

Chilled to the spine, frozen to her very heart, the girl stood there motionless. The time, which seemed eternity, must have been less than two seconds. Then the unexpected happened. Some large object came hurtling through the air. It struck the gypsy squarely on the wrist. The woman screamed. The knife went spinning

harmlessly through the air. The knife and woman disappeared into the wood.

Too astonished to move or speak, Florence stood there motionless until someone, a man, spoke.

"If you please, Miss," he was saying, "you might hand me my crutch. It's a bit awkward getting about on one leg without so much as a stick."

Florence found herself staring at a short, broad-shouldered man of middle age who sat, or rather lay sprawling by the roadside. A one legged man, he had indeed much need of a crutch.

"I—I beg your pardon." She saw in a trice what had happened. The man had witnessed the fight, and had at last had a part in it. At the crucial moment he had hurled his crutch. That crutch it had been that had knocked the murderous knife from the gypsy woman's hand.

"Probably saved my life," Florence told herself as a lump came into her throat.

"I—I hope you don't think me a needless brawler," she said as she handed him his crutch.

"Indeed not, Miss," said the stranger. "I saw

enough to know you were in the right of it. That blonde girl has been wearin' the shawl for a long spell. It's hers beyond a doubt.

"Only," he added as an afterthought, "I wouldn't have nothing to do with gypsies. Not nothing at all. They are a bad and treacherous lot. They'd sooner knife you in the back than fight fair. Mind what I'm tellin' you, you'll hear more of this later."

"Now where'd that knife go?" He beat the brush with his crutch. "There you are, my beauty." He picked it up. "And a better blade you'll never win. Take it." He offered it to Florence, hilt first. "It's yours by right of conquest."

"No! No!" The girl shuddered. "I wouldn't touch it."

"Well enough. I'll keep it. Next war we enlist in, you and I," he chuckled, "at least one of us will be better armed." Again he sat down by the roadside.

For a moment Florence stood there collecting her thoughts. At the end of that time she stole a glance at the stranger. He seemed a clean and

decent sort of person, rough but honest. His clothes were neat. The color in his cheeks was good.

"It's early," she told herself. "Probably hasn't had his breakfast. And Madame planned to stop about here for a cup of coffee brewed on the primus stove. I owe him something—a whole lot, in fact."

"Have you had your morning coffee?" she said.

"No, Miss."

"There'll be some coming down the road presently," she smiled. "Coffee and hot biscuits. Will you wait with me?"

"Coffee and hot biscuits comin' down the road?" he chuckled. "Do they walk on two good legs like you, or on one leg and a crutch, like me? Sure I'll wait with you, a good long while."

"The coffee comes in a high two-wheeled cart and the biscuits are keeping hot in a fireless cooker," she said, dropping to a grassy mound. "You won't have to wait long. I think I hear the cart now."

"So do I," said he. "Name's Patrick O'Farrel, if there's need for an introduction," he added.

"Please don't do that," said Florence a moment later. Patrick was shaving the tender twigs off the top of a bush with the gypsy knife. It was sharp as a razor blade.

* * * * *

"That's a strange flowerpot," said Patrick O'Farrel, half an hour later. The cart had arrived. He had marveled at their strange mode of travel and had reveled in Madame Strosser's hot biscuits and coffee. He had been walking round the cart when his eyes fell upon the iron hat, filled with the flaming flowers, which Florence had found in the dark forest.

"Strange use for an iron hat," was his next comment. "Still, it's good it can be used for other purposes than war. It's American," he said, examining it more closely. "I'm American myself, and Irish. I fought as an American. A man never fought for a better land. I gave my leg and nearly my life for America—for America and France."

"The flowers were not planted in the iron hat," said Florence. "They grew there quite naturally in the forest. I gathered them, hat and all."

"They did? And where did you find it?"

Florence described the place.

"You found it there?" He bent over as if to examine the bottom of the flowerpot which had once been the top of an iron hat. Then, as if thinking better of it, he straightened up.

"That," he said without emotion, "must be the neighborhood in which I lost my leg. I've never been quite sure about it, for I lost my iron hat at the same time and with the hat I lost all knowledge of anything at all for a long time after. An aged peasant couple," he said, sitting down, "dragged me off the field of battle into a cellar and saved my life. The woman is living still. That's why I'm still in France. I draw a pension. She's eighty years old. They lost all in the war. I—I've sort of tried to be a son to her. And I succeeded, tolerable," he added, "except when the fit seizes me to wander. The war made me restless. And you know," he added as if talking to himself, "I'm always looking for that dugout."

"What dugout?" Florence asked in surprise.

In answering this question the one-legged soldier related a strange tale.

"It was toward the last of the war," he said leaning forward impressively. "We had been driving the enemy steadily backward. Hard fighting it was. We came to a hill in the woods, and there they resisted us with all the powers in them.

"Little wonder at that, for in the sides of that hill, once we took it, we found the finest, safest, most comfortable dugouts we had ever seen. And it was in one of those very dugouts that I saw it." He closed his eyes as if in a vain effort to recall. "Where was it? Ah well!" His voice changed. "We were an exhausted fighting unit. Being relieved, we were put to rest in the dugouts.

"Twenty-four hours we slept like dead men. Then, bein' awake and quite human, we started explorin' the dugout. And there, far back in a chamber not before opened, I found it, the supreme surprise.

"Where was it?" Once more the look on his face became tense as he closed his eyes in a vain attempt to recall.

"Such an art treasure," he began again quite abruptly, "as was never before packed in so

narrow a space. Statuary, small things done in marble and bronze, small but natural, like life. Ugly grinning faces there were. And angels that seemed alive. There was little bronze imps, and priests also in bronze. And there was peasants at their labors, diggin', plowin', hoein', watchin' their cows.

"But most wonderful of all," his voice grew deep with emotion, "most marvelous was the statue of Joan of Arc. Three feet tall it was. Standin' there in glitterin' armour she was, with sword in hand. And it was done in solid gold. Solid gold!" His voice died to a whisper.

"I thought it was gold then," he went on after a time. "I have made sure of that since. All pure gold.

"And it's all buried," he added, a note of sadness creeping into his voice. "Buried by shell fire, somewhere in these hills of France. And I can't find it, can't recall the place, though I've tried these long years."

He sat for a time staring at the ground. Florence wanted to ask him to tell more, how he knew the statue was of pure gold, whence had

come the treasure and how he had learned of it, but something seemed to whisper to her that enough had been told for this day and that at some other time the rest of the story would be told.

So, in a few moments they parted, he to continue his search for buried treasure, they to revel in the beauty of the uplands of France.

Five days later the little party of three, Madame, Florence and Betty, were jogging down a well kept road. They were some distance from the one time war-ridden portion of France. As they looked about them they saw small clusters of homes that were farm villages; for the people of France, being a sociable folk and fond of company in long evenings, do not live in lonely homes built at isolated road crossings but cluster their cottages and journey out to till their land during the day.

They were plowing now. Odd beasts of toil they had too. Here a single ox, there a donkey, and here an ox and a horse hitched together. On the sloping hillside a full-grown girl sat knitting as she watched three grazing cows. A little

further on a boy drove in a flock of geese from their feeding.

"So peaceful," said Florence. "There can be no trouble anywhere in the world."

"And yet," said Madame, "we must not forget that these very people were once wakened morning after morning by the rumble of cannon, to wonder whether that day or the next would bring news of the death of a father or a brother. War is a terrible thing!"

Florence did not forget. She had not forgotten Patrick O'Farrel's story, nor had she forgotten her struggle of a few days back, nor the possibility that the feud she had started with the gypsy woman might be renewed at any time.

The camp of the gypsies was nearer than she knew at this very moment.

That evening they halted their cart by the roadside before a ruined chateau, at the edge of a large village. After they had eaten, Florence went for a stroll around the abandoned chateau. It had, she concluded, been wrecked by air bombs during the war.

In this she was right. She was not, however,

prepared for the signs of simple magnificence that lingered about the place. The high ceilinged living room had once boasted a broad fireplace encircled with tinted tiles that dated back a century. The tiles were all cracked or gone. The fireplace, where once a happy circle sat by the rosy gleam of blazing logs, was a black and dismal thing. The kitchen, too, had been panelled and tiled. The huge beams of the ceiling, from which had once hung suspended polished pots of copper and black iron, were still intact, but the place was silent, deserted.

Silent? Not quite. As the girl stood there sadly contemplating the ruins of a once magnificent home, she caught the sound of quiet sobbing.

Tiptoeing to the ruined doorway, she saw lying upon the broken stone steps a blonde-haired girl. Instantly she recognized her. She was the girl she had come to think of as the "blonde gypsy."

"But where is the crimson shawl?" was her next thought.

Suddenly, as if sensing that someone was about,

the girl sprang to her feet and disappeared into the shadows.

"Here," thought Florence, "is fresh mystery. Why should a gypsy be weeping upon the steps of a ruined home? Gypsies have no home save their wagons. I wonder if she is truly a gypsy girl after all?"

She was to wonder about this many times in the future.

CHAPTER III

LOST IN THE STORM

AS FLORENCE left the ruined chateau she noted with some alarm that the sky had grown quite dark and that night was coming down with alarming suddenness.

Hurrying as fast as she could, she arrived at the camp to find everything in commotion. Madame was struggling to harness the pony while Betty indiscriminately crowded dishes, silverware and food into the baskets.

"There is little time. We must make haste," said Madame. "There will be a great storm. We must go into the village for the night. And there are so few accommodations in these small villages. What shall we do?"

"It can't be far to the nearest inn," said Florence. "If you like, I will go ahead and see what can be done."

"That is well," said Madame. "We will finish

packing. Then we will drive straight down this street. You must stop us and tell us what you have found."

Florence departed and the others continued their packing.

To her consternation Florence found that the town was much larger than she had thought. It was one of those long and narrow villages that go straggling on and on for all the world as if it had started on a springtime stroll and forgotten to stop.

She had walked for fully fifteen minutes, with the sky growing blacker and the night darker, when she began to be truly alarmed.

Meeting a Frenchman hurrying home, she enquired in very bad French the way to the nearest hotel.

"A droit un," he shouted at her, *"la gauche trois, à droit un."*

"A block to the right, three to the left and one to the right," she interpreted, greatly relieved. "That is really only two blocks off this street. I will go there, make arrangements, then return to wait for the cart."

The thing was not so simple as she imagined. Once she had left the river road, she found the streets narrow and angling. Which was right? Which left? Which straight ahead? This she could not surely tell. She had been walking for ten minutes when she began to suspect that she was hopelessly lost. There was no hotel in sight, only low buildings and a small, very ancient church. Which direction lay the road she had left? This she could not say.

She looked wildly about her. The streets were deserted. Suddenly a huge drop of rain struck her on the cheek. Others spattered on the pavement all about her.

"Must get in somewhere," she told herself. A low cottage lay just before her. The door was open. She darted inside. Not a second too soon. A perfect deluge of cold rain came crashing down upon the pavement. She found herself in a dark corner before a door.

"Can't do a thing now," she told herself. "Might as well go inside. Peasant people. Probably got a fire. Perhaps a kettle boiling on the hearth."

She knocked several times. No response.

"That's strange."

She tried the door. It gave to her touch. The passage before her was dark. "Hallway," she thought.

It was not a hallway, but a narrow room. Once more she came to a door. Once again she knocked. Still no response.

She opened the second door. Still silence. She groped about the place, but found nothing.

This is the queerest thing I have ever known—a cottage in France kept in good repair but not tenanted," she told herself. There was a strained note in her voice.

"But then," she thought more quietly, "I am safe from the storm. How it rains!"

She thought of Madame and Betty. "Hope they found some safe shelter. Sorry I blundered so."

She could do nothing about that now. Her own future was of great concern. Her future for the present narrowed itself down to a seat on a hard floor and plenty of time to think in the dark.

Think she did, and her thoughts were not all pleasant. What if this were the haunt of gypsies? What if a door across the room should open and a dim candlelight should reveal the ugly face of that gypsy woman she had fought on the lonely road? She shuddered.

"But such things happen only in a book," she reassured herself. "This is merely an untenanted house. The storm will pass. I will join my friends. Together we will find shelter and sleep. To-morrow will be another day."

Thus quieted in mind and body, she sank to a place in one corner of the room and gave herself over to thoughts of many things.

She meditated upon the strangeness of their mode of travel. In the end she blessed the name of the benefactress who had made this visit to France possible.

"We will learn a great deal more about France and her interesting people than we could possibly do in any other way," she told herself.

She thought of Patrick O'Farrel and his strange story. She wished she had asked him more questions when he told his story that day

by the roadside. How could he have been so sure that the statue of Joan of Arc was made of pure gold?

"The whole affair may be but a dream fancy that has come to him," she told herself. "Perhaps his mind has been a little unbalanced by the terrors of war. So many minds were ruined in this way."

Yet she could but believe that the story had some foundation in truth. She hoped they might again meet this wandering soldier.

"One part of the story most certainly is true," she told herself. "These people of the highlands of France do revere the name of Joan of Arc. Napoleon is not their hero. It is Joan. There is no village so poor but it can boast a statue erected to her memory."

So she thought on and on. The storm appeared to have no end. The day had been long and tiring. She became drowsy. Her head sank lower and lower upon her breast until at last, oblivious to all about her in that narrow chamber and the great world outside, she slept the sleep of exhaustion.

How long she slept she will never know. What woke her? Beyond doubt it was a ray of light. The storm had passed. Off somewhere on a hillside a motor car was moving. For a space of ten seconds its light played upon the wall of that narrow room. It wakened her and remained there just long enough to reveal an inscription upon the wall.

"In this chamber," so the inscription ran, "Joan of Arc was born."

There was more to the inscription. More she could not read, for the light from the window whisked away, leaving the room darker than before.

She did not need to read more. A sudden warmth came over her. This was the childhood home of France's most beloved child. She, Florence Huyler, had slept in the immortal Joan's bedchamber. What American girl could say that? No other in all the world, surely.

She sprang to her feet. "The storm is over. I must go find my friends."

Oddly enough, in another part of the village Madame and Betty were at that moment listening

to a tale that had to do with the statue of Joan, the statue of gold.

An hour later, in a very narrow bed and a chamber as small as was that of the immortal Joan, Florence and Betty lay side by side awaiting sleep that, because of the excitement of the day, did not come at once.

Florence had made her way back through the crooked streets, to discover their cart, well canvassed over, standing before a tiny peasant home. A generous French matron had taken Madame and Betty in from the storm and had agreed to keep them for the night.

"It's the strangest thing!" said Betty, giving Florence an impulsive hug beneath the blankets. "Just think of our being driven by the rain into this cottage. And Marie, as she calls herself, is the only person in all the village who could assure us that the statue of gold is a reality and not a dream. It looks like Providence."

"It *is* Providence," said Florence. "Things do not just happen in this world of ours. Everything in the world—the rain, the sunshine, the birds, the flowers, even the flowers that grew in that iron

hat—are under the direction of a kind and wise God. And do you know," her tone grew serious, impressive, "do you know, Betty, I believe something very wonderful will come of all these curious adventures."

"Adventures," said Betty, enviously, "you have all the adventures. Just think of falling asleep in that marvelous place, the birthplace of Joan of Arc, and not knowing about it till afterward!"

"You wait," said Florence. "Your share of adventures will come. Never fear. But tell me, how do you know that the statue of gold is a reality?"

"Marie told us," Betty replied. "After we had a cup of tea we sat about that adorable little fireplace in the kitchen and she told us this was not her native town, but that she had been a refugee during the war.

"Her village, she said, had been taken by the enemy. Then she began to tell us what a remarkable village it had been before the war. Tourists came to it from all parts of the world then. But now it is shabby and poor. Tourists do not come now."

"Why?"

"Their art treasure was carried away."

"What art treasure?"

"The very treasure that Patrick O'Farrel saw in that German dugout in the side of the hill!"

"No!" said Florence, sitting up.

"There can be no doubt about it. She described it all, the gnomes, the angels, the peasants, the marble and bronze, even the statue of gold, just as he told it."

"But how could all that be in one small village?"

"That village was the birthplace of a famous sculptor and artist. He was a trifle strange. He believed that art should be enjoyed by the commonest people. So he returned to his native village to complete his life work. He built a small art museum at the center of the village. He began filling it with his finest creations. Each year saw the collection enriched by several new pieces in bronze and marble.

"The people of the village grew very proud of him and of their museum. Strangers heard of him and came from afar to talk with him and

to see his works of art. The village became prosperous. Then the people came to him and said, 'You must make us a statue of the great Joan.'

"He said, 'I will make one, but only of gold. And you must furnish the gold. The size of the statue will be the measure of your devotion to France's great child.'

"The people went home and gathered together their gold. They were not rich, but each family possessed a little, one gold plate, a chain, a ring. All these were brought together and the statue was made.

"And that statue," said Betty, "is the statue Patrick O'Farrel saw in the dugout. It must still be there, for though the enemy attacked in force and shelled the place with heavy batteries in an attempt to recapture the hill, they never succeeded. Oh, Florence!" she cried. "Think what it would mean if we were to find that statue and the other works of art and restore them to the village from which the terrible war took so much!"

"We must try to find Patrick O'Farrel and see

if he can tell us more about it," said Florence, pulling Betty down beneath the covers and wrapping the blankets about her. "But now we must sleep."

Strangely enough, just as she dropped off to sleep Florence had a mental picture of the iron hat filled with blooming flowers.

"As if it had something to do with it all," she told herself, sleepily.

CHAPTER IV

PATRICK'S CURIOUS DISCOVERY

"THAT," said Patrick O'Farrel, "is my iron hat. I lost it on the battlefield ten years ago."

"That hat?" Florence stared at the one-legged soldier in unfeigned surprise as he set the steel helmet at a jaunty angle on his head. Had he said, "You have found my long lost leg; let me have it," she could scarcely have been more astonished. That the steel helmet which Florence had found in the black old forest, filled with growing flowers, one helmet among thousands that had been lost, should prove to be the very one their wandering friend had lost seemed incredible.

"Still," she told herself, "stranger things than that have happened in war-ridden, battle-torn France."

Three weeks had glided by since she had found

the iron hat and made the acquaintance of the one-legged soldier.

Quite uneventful weeks they had been, but filled with priceless discoveries in this wonderland of France. They had left Domremy, the birthplace of Joan of Arc, with reluctance, and that not until they had visited the imposing castle on the distant hillside, had wandered through the oak forest that in Joan's time was supposed to be infested by a dragon, and had listened to many enchanting stories told of the immortal Joan.

They had ridden over the rougher hill where grape arbors were turning purple and green, had wandered along the ancient walls of Toul, one of the few walled cities still standing, then had turned their pony down the slopes to richer fields and fairer lands.

Nowhere had they met with the blonde gypsy. Patrick O'Farrel and his story of the statue of gold had all but faded from their memories. The spring flowers in the iron hat had bloomed and wilted as spring flowers will. Florence had removed the living plant from the iron hat and had set it in rich soil at the foot of a great oak by the

roadside that it might gladden some heart when spring came round again.

For some reason she could not quite explain, she had kept the iron hat. And now here again was Patrick O'Farrel, who had come upon their camp quite suddenly at eventide, saying, "That is my hat. I lost it on the battlefield ten years ago."

"That sounds like a fairy story," Florence said.

"It does indeed," replied the wandering soldier, dropping to a place beside the fire. "For all that, it's true enough. I'll prove it to you. See," he said, drawing a long knife from its sheath.

Florence shuddered. It was the very knife that had been struck from the angry gypsy woman's hand three weeks before.

"See," Patrick repeated, "I scratch away the rust on the top, and there you have my initials. P. O. F. Could anything be sweeter? I did it with a hand drill, so every dent that helps form a letter was cut deep. Rust and time could not efface it. Yes," he said musingly, "it's my hat. It was on the battlefield I—

"S-s-say!" he stuttered, breaking short off. "Where did ye find this hat?" He leaned for-

ward, staring at the girl as if he would look into her very soul.

"Wait," said the girl. "Let me think. It was not far from a small village. The name of the village—" she hesitated, trying to recall the village.

"The name of the village," O'Farrel repeated, his breath coming short and quick. Florence thought him out of his head. Then like a flash the full meaning of it all came to her.

"The name of the village was Morey," she said.

"Morey," he exclaimed, gripping his crutch and struggling to his feet. "I have been there many's the time since the war. Morey. That's the place! A tiny village with a few farmers' homes, two shops, a cobbler, and rough hills behind. There's a church with a slim spire, and a graveyard near. Some of the tombstones were shattered by shell fire. I know the place.

"And that," he said, coming into a quieter mood, "is the place where I was wounded and saved by two aged peasants. It is on that rugged hill that the German dugouts were hidden. That's

the place where the art treasure is buried, and the statue of gold.

"I must go," he said, starting forward. "I will go to-night."

"You must not," said Florence. "Not to-night. It is too far. Sit down here by the fire. Madame and Betty will soon be back from the village. They are due here at any time. You must tell us the story all over again. We believe you. We've learned that your story is true. I am sure Madame will consent to our driving you to Morey. We will be up and away with the dawn."

An hour later, after a supper of dark French bread and cocoa, with potatoes baked in hot ashes and veal steak broiled over the coals, the two girls and Madame settled back in their places by the fire to hear once more the story of the statue of gold from Patrick O'Farrel's lips. It had already been agreed that with next day's dawn they should be away on their strange treasure hunt. Madame Strosser was most eager of all. This was not strange, for was not France her native land? And had not the Maid of Orleans been her idol from childhood?

"War," Patrick O'Farrel began, "is a terrible thing. It takes men's lives, destroys their homes and breaks their children's hearts."

"And yet," said Madame, "there are worse things can happen to a man than that he be sent to war."

"What can that be?" said Patrick, sitting up quickly.

"He may be cheated."

"Cheated?" The girls joined Patrick in his shout of amazement.

"Many wars," said Madame, "have been fought because men have been cheated out of that which rightfully belongs to them. When the time comes that the weak and the poor are so ground down by the powerful and the rich that they know not where their next day's food is coming from, then they rise to fight for their rights. What was it," she asked, "that gave Joan of Arc her great power? Her purity, her trust in God, and her love of France, to be sure. But back of that lay the grim fact that the poor of France were starving.

"But now," she continued, "the rich and powerful ones are learning, I hope, that their own

security and happiness depends upon the comfort and happiness of all. If this is true we will have no more war.

"Excuse me," she said to the soldier, "I interrupted your story."

For a time Patrick ignored the suggestion that he continue the story of the statue of gold, but sat there in silence, head on one side, listening.

"I thought I heard something moving back there in the brush," he said in a low voice.

The girls stared at him in astonishment. They had heard nothing. So they looked at the low bushes that surrounded their camp on three sides, then back at Patrick.

"You must have very sharp ears," said Betty.

"Yes," said Patrick, "ears made sharp by many, many nights in the trenches. When some slight sound from before you in No Man's Land, unheard, means death, you develop a hearing that you never before have known. But let us return to the art treasure, the statue of gold," he said, moving closer to them. "That was something to see, not to hear. And we saw it. It was in a dugout, an enemy's dugout, on that rugged hill-

side just beyond the village of Morey. I remember now. It all comes back to me. Below us were shattered homes and the graveyards with tombstones all smashed. And directly before us was the church. The hand of God had preserved it. There was not a scratch upon it, and is not to this day. We had been in that dugout for more than a day, resting, when word came—"

He broke short off to seize his crutch and beat the bush directly behind him.

Did Florence catch the sound of stealthy movement behind the bushes? She thought so.

"Someone's prowling about," said Patrick. "Well, they'd better have a care!" He said this last in a rather loud voice. "I still have that gypsy knife and it's a very good one, I can tell you!"

For a moment they listened. All was quiet.

"We had seen the statuary," O'Farrel went on after a moment, "the marble and the bronze and that matchless thing of pure gold. Then, of a sudden came the word to turn out. The enemy was coming back.

"We came out armed to the teeth. I stumbled

over a dead man and went down. Before I could get on my feet a shell burst above me. It knocked off my iron hat and my senses as well. It must have got my leg too, for when I woke up, hours later, it was gone. So was my iron hat.

"But you found it." He turned to Florence. "You found it on the hillside. Had it been moved from the spot where it fell? Not likely. And back of it, just a few yards, is the entrance to that enemy's dugout, sealed by shell fire, hiding the treasure.

"To-morrow," he said impressively, "we will dig, dig as we never dug before, not even in the war."

Two hours later, when Patrick had gone to the village for the night and Florence was tucked snugly in her strange bed, she wondered who could have been prowling about their camp, and why.

It was an eager and excited little party that mounted the two-wheeled cart at break of dawn. They had not paused for breakfast; this they would have an hour or two later at some village inn. Madame and Patrick mounted upon the

seat. Patrick, being a man, took the reins. Florence and Betty piled in behind and came to rest on a soft cushion of bedding.

For Patrick the day's adventure promised to fulfill a dream of years standing. He hoped to restore to the village he had learned to love its long lost treasure. To Florence, and to Betty, the thing they were about to do took on a highly romantic aspect. The Maid of Orleans had long held a place of great honor in their hearts. Now to be bringing to light the most priceless statue of her that had ever been created was like liberating an angel, or Joan herself, from a dungeon.

Their joy in the beginning was short lived. Hardly had they covered a hundred yards when with a grinding crash the cart tilted sideways and upset. Spilling the two girls out, it piled the greater part of their luggage, bedding, pans and dishes, upon them. At the same time, the right wheel went rolling down the hill before them.

The whole affair would have been highly amusing had they not been in such a great hurry.

The girls were not hurt, and few dishes were

broken. They laughingly made the best of it.

"Burr's gone from the axle," said Patrick. "Now where can it be?"

After a half hour's search, they found it just where the cart had stood the night before.

"That burr," said Patrick, "did not come off. It was taken off by someone with a purpose." His brow was wrinkled in thought. Florence knew he was thinking of the mysterious sounds behind the bushes the night before.

Once more they were on their way. But not for long. Two miles had been covered when, as they mounted a steep hill, one of the traces broke. Quick action by Florence, who leaped to the ground and choked the wheel with a stone, saved them from a spill.

"Cut," was Patrick's verdict as he examined the trace. "Cut half in two, that's what it is."

Again Florence thought of the eavesdropper and wished more than ever for haste.

Because of these unfortunate delays, darkness was upon them before they reached the spot where the party had camped on that other night when Florence had found the iron hat.

"We'll go look at the place to-night," said Florence. "Right away. We have a flashlight. I remember the way, I can find the very spot."

"Lead on," said Patrick, unconsciously gripping the handle of the gypsy knife.

"I shall guard the cart," said Madame.

It was with a strange feeling that Florence marched straight up the narrow road to the hillside where hundreds of America's best had died.

Her nerves were on edge. Here a twig snapped. She jumped. There a rabbit leaped up before her. She sprang back with a suppressed scream.

Still she marched on. "Here," she told herself, "I found the gypsy shawl. Wonder where the blonde gypsy is now.

"Here I rounded a curve. There I found wood. And here—here is the very tree," she said aloud. "And there is the hole in the sod from which I took the iron hat."

"The dugout," said Patrick, a bit unsteadily, "should be right up that rocky ridge."

Without another word, they began to climb.

CHAPTER V

THE DIM LANTERN

TO FIND the spot where one gathered a cluster of flowers but a fortnight before is one thing; to locate a buried, grass grown and brush covered dugout that has been forgotten for ten years is quite another.

For two hours the eager little company climbed back and forth, up and down, to right and left on this one time battle-scarred hill.

"It is strange," said Florence as she at last dropped to a place beside her pal on a great gray rock. "One would not suppose that nature could heal her wounds so well. Just think, a little more than ten years ago shells crashed through these tree tops to bury themselves in the earth, then explode with such violence that the very world trembled. Trees were torn up by the roots. I know that. I have heard soldiers tell of it."

"Yes," said Patrick O'Farrel, "trees and the

very earth that gave them place for roots. Great boulders were split to bits. It was as if a cyclone had struck the forest."

"And yet," said Florence, "see it now. Yonder is a tree that must have lost its top. But it has grown a new one. It's rather a flat top, but for all that a good one. And the trees that were completely uprooted—"

"Have been carried away by the peasants long ago," Patrick finished with a sigh. "You don't miss them because you never knew they were here. 'Tis the way with men, too. Think of the fine young fellows who went over the top and never came back! Thousands an' thousands an' thousands, English, Scotch, Irish, French. But you don't say, 'Where's Pierre? Where's Mike? Where's Hugh? Where's James?' We forget that they lived at all. But here they be, many of 'em. Sleepin' beneath the very sod on which you're settin'—like as not.

"We're not goin' to find that dugout to-night." He rose to grip his crutch. "Nor mebby to-morrow. It's tough not to have the thing you want when it's so near. That's the way of life."

He lead on down the hill to camp, where Madame awaited them with milk already warming for cocoa.

"I'll go down to the village," said Patrick, when their belated lunch was over. "Know some Frenchies down there. Mebby they can tell me somethin'. See you bright an' early in the mornin'."

* * * * *

Three days had passed. Night was falling over the hills of France. Halfway up the slope Florence and Betty sat side by side. This long range of hills that once had known the roar and smoke of battle and had witnessed the agony of death was silent and peaceful now. Far away the blue sky, touched here and there with a patch of glory, was already turning dark with the coming of night.

Far away ran a gleaming canal, a silver ribbon on a cloth of green and gold. Canal boats, that seemed but toy boats on the surface of a rivulet, crept slowly down the silvery way.

"Poor Patrick O'Farrel," Betty said at last. "I am afraid we shall never find his dugout."

"And he is so much in earnest about it," sighed Florence.

"Why not?" said Betty quickly. "Think of that village!"

Florence did think of the village that had furnished a cradle, a cottage and at last a grave to the great, gentle and kindly sculptor and artist. She had thought of it many times. For, on the second day after arriving at this place, they had abandoned their search long enough to hitch their spotted pony to the lumbering cart and to drive to a small village that was the home of the famous artist. There they had witnessed the poverty of the villagers. They had wandered through the desolate little museum of art, which in its time had seen so much of joy and life, but which was now as somber and devoid of life as a mausoleum. They had taken tea in the cottage that had once belonged to the great artist, and had come away fired with a fresh zeal for their search.

But where was the dugout? That was the question. "The iron hat," they had argued in the beginning, "should be near the spot." But this, they concluded after numerous soundings and

diggings here and there, could not be the fact.

"And why should it?" Florence had asked at last. "A steel helmet in the midst of a great battle does not necessarily lie where it drops. A bursting shell may hurl it hundreds of feet; the mere touch of a soldier's foot may set it rolling. The dugout may be a long way from the spot where I found the hat."

Realizing the truth of this, they widened their search. They wandered over broad surfaces of the hill. They beat the earth in the hope of catching a hollow sound. They drove iron stakes here and there. They dug about until the keeper of the Forest Preserve hunted them out and, pointing to a freshly turned spadeful of earth, informed them that they must not dig in the Preserve.

"So now," said Florence as she sat beside her companion, watching the sunset fade, "we have really gotten nowhere."

"And yet," said Betty as her black eyes reflected the hope that was in her heart, "I expect that we will succeed."

It was not strange that Betty should be the

more optimistic of the two. Florence had tramped the hills all day. Betty, who had been assisting Madame in fixing up the temporary quarters they had taken in the village, had but recently joined the search.

"Do you know," said Betty, suddenly springing up, "I think I'll climb to the top of the hill and watch the stars come out. Then I'll make a wish on the first star I see and perhaps my wish will come true." She threw back her head and laughed as she went dancing away up the long hill.

Florence, whose eyes followed her whirling, elf-like figure, wished with all her heart that all her happy dreams might come true. Then she settled back in her place and fell to wondering of many things. Was the dugout that Patrick had described somewhere beneath her on this hill? Was the treasure buried there? The bronze and marble, and that matchless thing of gold? Were they all there? And would they find them? She had hoped so. But now her hopes were waning.

"It's for Patrick and for that ragged little

village and for France, who has suffered so much!" she told herself.

France had come to mean much to her. Madame had told her what France stood for. She had seen much for herself. Art. ART. This was the big word in France. Many a poor man lived for his art, his painting, his sculpture, his music, his poetry alone. Money meant nothing to such as these.

"And to think," she said aloud, "that a man, a very great artist, should live his life through, should produce much that is beauty and a joy forever, and then that a cruel war should come and hide away, perhaps destroy forever, all this beauty!

"Surely," she said, rising to her full height, a sturdy figure standing there in the shadows of a great tree, "surely there is some way to find the dugout. One—"

She had said this to herself in a low tone. For this she was glad.

She broke short off because three slouching figures had appeared in the open space before her. Two of these were men, one a woman. Already

it was too dark for her to study their features. She did note with a little intake of breath that the men carried full sacks on their backs and that the woman, who led the way with a dim lantern, held in her left hand some object that might be a spade.

Even as she noted this, the foremost man stumbled and all but fell. In righting himself he allowed some object to fall from the sack he carried.

With a low exclamation he called to the woman to bring the lantern.

"Where is it?" demanded the woman impatiently.

"Somewhere here." The man's tone was gruff.

"Here, you!" said the other man. "Give me the light."

All this was said in French, but Florence understood.

As the woman moved forward to bring the light closer, the first man bent over to utter a low exclamation.

At once three heads came together. That instant, as the light of the dim lantern fell upon

them, Florence recognized the garb of gypsies. More than this, she saw at once that the woman was none other than she who had attacked the blonde girl in the lonely highway and would doubtless have committed murder had not Patrick O'Farrel's flying crutch interfered.

One other thing she noted, and this last took all the courage and joy out of her heart. The thing she had taken for a spade *was* a spade. What was more, fresh, damp earth still clung to its blade.

It all came to her in an instant. She recalled how, as Patrick told the story of the hidden art treasure, someone had appeared to be lurking in the bush at the back of their camp.

"This gypsy woman was hiding there," she told herself with sinking heart. "She told the others. They came to this place. They have been hiding out somewhere and have been searching for the dugout as we have. And their search has been rewarded. In those sacks, beyond a doubt, are the priceless treasures."

She felt suffocated. She wanted to scream, but could not. Perhaps she did make a sound with

her lips, or move in her place. However that may be, the gypsy woman suddenly straightened up, darted a glance in her direction, then came charging straight up the hill.

CHAPTER VI

TRAPPED BY A SHAWL

IN THE meantime Betty had fallen into what at first sight might have appeared to be a trap. Having climbed the slope, she had stood for a time enjoying the evening breeze that whistled across the hilltop. Then, having caught sight of the first dim star, she crossed her fingers and uttered her strange, fanciful prayer. After that came the wish. And this was, of course, that they might yet find the buried dugout and the treasures it concealed.

This ceremony over, she began retracing her steps down the hill. There was, however, she told herself, no need for haste. Florence would be glad of an opportunity to rest. The early night was beautiful. The trees cast long, dreamy shadows. The fresh, damp, leaf-strewn earth gave off such a sweet fragrance as is known only to the forests in springtime. Nor was the fra-

grance all one. The oak, the bramble-bush, the pine, each has a perfume all its own, and that even before it is in bloom.

In her enjoyment of all this the girl had all but walked upon an object quite foreign to it all when, with a sudden start, she stopped dead in her tracks. There, directly before her, was a broad crimson patch.

"Of all things!" she exclaimed beneath her breath. "The gypsy shawl! And in such a place!"

In fright, she darted to the deep shadows cast by a clump of bushes. There, pressed far back among the leaves, her heart madly beating, she waited, watched, listened. For what? This she hardly knew. Of one thing she was certain; the shawl had not come here by itself. Who had brought it? The dark gypsy woman? The blonde girl? How was she to know?

For a full five minutes she stood there motionless. Then, since nothing happened, she stepped out into the moonlight and once more approached the shawl.

She put out a hand to grasp the edge of the

thing of ancient beauty, when without warning the earth crumbled beneath her and she plunged headlong into the very center of the shawl. Next instant both girl and shawl disappeared into a dark cavity which the shawl had hidden from her view.

* * * * *

From her previous experience Florence had come to feel a great fear of the dark-eyed gypsy woman. As she saw her rushing up the hill at her, she realized that there was nothing to gain by standing her ground.

"They have found the dugout and robbed it, that's clear," she thought to herself. "If I could get possession of those bags I would, even at some risk. But I can not. They are three. I am one. Besides—" She shuddered. "Besides, the woman probably has another long knife by this time." So she took to her heels. But the gypsy woman, nothing daunted, came running after her.

Florence was a runner of no mean ability. But the gypsy woman, hardened as she was by outdoor life, and inspired by who knows what fury, lost not an inch. Indeed she gained on the panting,

perspiring girl. Now, as they left the forest and took to an open field, she was twenty yards behind. As Florence vaulted a low wall at the far side of the narrow field she realized that her pursuer had gained half the distance.

Another hundred yards and the girl caught the sound of the woman's breathing.

What should she do? She had been running blindly. Now, to her consternation, she saw not twenty yards before her a wall. This time the wall was higher than her head, one of those formidable walls that enclose a French garden.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself.

She glanced to the right, down the hill. Another wall. She had run into a trap.

She was about to turn and face her pursuer in a vain hope of outmatching her prowess, when her eye caught a fantastic shadow against the wall before her. She realized its cause at once. This gave her hope.

Some frugal French gardener had planted a pear tree squarely against the wall. Branches that ran toward the wall had been pruned away. The result was a gnarled pear tree, with limbs

forming a double ladder, lying squarely against the wall.

Up this ladder prepared by Nature and a Frenchman the girl sprang. Up and over. With a thud that fairly shook her teeth loose, she struck the solid earth beyond the wall.

Instantly there sounded out a fierce roar.

"A dog!" she thought in fresh despair.

Springing to her feet, she leaped for a second fruit tree that grew against the inner side of the wall.

Hardly had she reached a place of safety than a great wolfhound came leaping down the garden path.

The gypsy woman had climbed the outer pear tree which was some two rods from the one which Florence now occupied. But, because of the dog, she dared not enter the garden. The top of the wall had been brought to a sharp peak, so there was no walking along it. The gypsy woman could only cling to her perch and heap imprecation first on Florence, then on the dog.

As a door opened at the end of the garden walk and a voice demanded in French, "Who's

there?" the gypsy dropped from her place and vanished into the darkness, leaving the field to Florence and the dog.

It took the girl some time to explain her predicament to the owner of the dog. He understood little English, but in time she succeeded and was allowed to go her way in peace.

"And now where is Betty?" she asked herself.

And indeed, where was she? At the bottom of a dark hole, to be sure. And in such a plight! In her downward plunge she had struck her head against a stone and had been knocked unconscious.

For a time she lay there as if she might never rise again. But in due time the cold, damp air revived her and she sat up dizzily, to stare about her in a vain attempt to make heads and tails to this strange misadventure.

CHAPTER VII

UNDERGROUND

THE FEELING that came over Betty as she regained possession of her senses, was one of abject terror. The smell of fresh earth was in her nostrils. The chill damp of a tomb was upon her cheek.

"It's as if someone had dug me a grave and invited me to fall into it." She shuddered. Then of a sudden she sprang to her feet. She put out a hand. She felt about her for the gypsy shawl.

"Gone!" she whispered. "Perhaps it was not there at all. Could I have imagined it all?"

Terror gripped her heart. For a space of ten seconds she stood there motionless, frozen to the spot. Then, as the blood came surging back to her paralyzed limbs, she began a frantic struggle to escape from this horrible tomb.

Clawing, creeping, struggling, falling back, to renew the struggle once more, with bruised knees

and bleeding hands, she battled her way upward until with one wild cry of triumph she threw herself exhausted upon the leafy sod that was the forest's bed.

For a full moment, too much overcome by fright and exhaustion for action, she lay there like one dead. Then, catching the sound of a voice in the distance, she suddenly sat up.

The voice was calling her name. "Betty! Betty! Where are you?"

Three times the voice called. Three times she failed to answer. The whole affair seemed to her so unreal; the voice too was unreal.

Then like a flash it came to her. She had left Florence half way up the hill. Time had elapsed. How much time? She could not tell. Florence had tired of waiting. She it was who called.

"Yo-hoo!" she cried, springing to her feet.

"Yo-hoo!" came echoing back from the opposite hill.

A second of waiting and there came a louder call.

"Betty! Betty! What has happened? Where are you?"

"Here! Here! Coming!"

Betty went racing down the hill.

So great was their excitement, so gripping their fear of the night and those who haunted it, that not one word was spoken of their curious adventures until they had reached the cabin, until Betty's torn garments were removed and her bleeding hands attended to, and until they were part of a circle round a hearth fire, a circle that contained Madame and Patrick as well as themselves. Then words came fast and furious.

"They took the treasure!" exclaimed Florence in a breathless fashion. "Sacked it up and carried it away!"

"What!" Patrick allowed his crutch to go clattering on the floor.

"They took the art treasure, the bronze, the marble, the statue of gold. They—"

"Who?" Patrick demanded fiercely.

"Who? Why, the gypsies, of course. Who else?"

"The accursed gypsies!" exclaimed Patrick, snatching up his crutch to go hobbling across the floor in great excitement.

"But did you truly see them?" asked Madame, who always kept a cool head, whatever happened.

"Of course I saw them. Didn't the woman chase me half a mile? Wouldn't she have killed me, like as not, if I hadn't climbed a wall?"

"Did she?" said Madame in quiet consternation.

"But the art treasure?" said Patrick, sitting down again. "Did you see it? Did you see the statue of gold?"

"N-no," Florence replied. "It was all in rough sacks. The men had it on their backs, in rough sacks. But what else could it have been?"

"Yes, what?" said Betty.

"You can't tell," said Patrick, heaving a sigh of relief. "Never give up the ship till she's sunk."

"We'll never know till we go through the dugout," said Betty. "I know the very spot."

"You do?" came in a chorus.

"That's how I got banged up. Stepped on the gypsy shawl and fell right in. To-morrow we can go through the thing."

"To-morrow?" shouted Patrick. "Why do you

say to-morrow? To-morrow may be too late. They may have taken only a part of the stuff. May not have seen the statue of gold at all. Young lady," he took Betty gently by the hand, "lead the way."

But Betty shrank back. She had experienced a thrill, and that not a happy one.

"If they didn't take it all, they'll be back," she demurred. "There'll be a fight."

"Who cares?" said stout-hearted, strong-armed Florence. "Those brave French people did enough fighting for us during the war. If need be, we can do a little for them."

"Bravo!" said Madame, who could get quite excited when occasion arose. "And but see! There above the mantel are two great pistols. Will Mister O'Farrel please see if they might yet be of some use?"

"They are from the war," was Patrick's expert verdict after a brief inspection. "They are well preserved, and loaded. But who's to use one beside me?"

"There's no need," began Madame. "We—"

"I'll take one," Florence broke in. "They are

not half as terrible as the gypsy knife. Besides, I have fired one many times. Only show me how this French kind works." Patrick found her an apt pupil.

It was quite a formidable looking band that left the cottage a quarter hour later. Patrick, with a pistol at his belt, led the way. Florence, similarly armed, came next. Madame, who had not so much as killed a chicken in her life, came next. On her face was a grim look of determination. In her hand the gypsy knife gleamed. Betty brought up the rear. She had agreed to direct the expedition, not to lead it. She experienced great difficulty in preventing her teeth from chattering, and was prepared at any moment for flight.

The night was dark. There was no moon. The millions of stars that dotted the cloudless sky served only to bring out the black shadows cast by clumps of pine and fir trees.

"It's th—this way," Betty directed. "To your right and up the hill."

Beyond her words of guidance, not a word was said.

The night was still, too still. Not a breath of air stirred the fresh green leaves of spring. From somewhere afar off came the bark of a dog. The village clock tolled off the hour of ten in a solemn manner.

"Now to—to your left, along this ridge." Betty's teeth still chattered.

Then of a sudden, as the leader hesitated, she took a firm grip on her nerves. "I won't be a coward!" she told herself fiercely.

"Here!" she exclaimed, bounding forward and seizing the flashlight. "It's over this way, then again to the right."

Five minutes more of breathless marching, and they stood in a semicircle about a dark, damp hole that seemed a grave.

"Should have brought a ladder," grumbled Patrick. "Who'd have thought the thing would be so deep?"

"The shawl was there when I fell in," said Betty. "I bumped my head and went out, like a candle. When I came to myself the shawl was gone."

"Gone?" said Florence.

"Gone!" repeated Betty. "I am beginning to believe it's a magic shawl."

"But who put it there?" Florence asked in a puzzled tone. "Last time I saw it the blonde girl wore it."

"She's one of the gypsies," said Patrick.

"Do you know that?" Betty asked quickly.

"N-no, not absolutely; but who couldn't guess?

"But let's see," he began, flashing the light around. "How are we going to get down there?

"Ah! I have it!" he exclaimed. "Yonder's a dead branch. It'll do for a ladder."

"Wonder how they found this dugout?" said Betty as Patrick and Florence went for the heavy branch.

"Oh, gypsies find what they want," said Madame. "Mysterious people, those gypsies. They know a thousand secrets. When they camp in the forest where there is no water, what do they do? Arrange a forked stick and witch for it. Where the forked stick points they dig. Do they find water? Indeed they do! *Toujours!* Always Always! Who knows but they have a manner of witching for precious metal. It has been said

that they do. And there was in the dugout, do not forget, the precious statue of gold!

"But *Voila!* There is the ladder. See! We must go down."

The "ladder" which Patrick had provided was but a branch with several hacked off branches for steps, but in the end even Madame in her rather bulky skirts managed to descend into the yawning interior.

"Now!" breathed Florence as they faced about and prepared to enter the mysterious place.

"Now!" echoed Betty as she gripped her pal's arm.

CHAPTER VIII

CIRCLES OF DUST

PATRICK, who had spent many a night in such a place as this during the great and terrible war, and for whom the place held neither illusion nor terror, led the way.

The narrow passage they entered smelled like a long abandoned cellar. Having crowded their way through this, they came to a long, rather narrow room lined on either side by rude shelves.

"Bunk room," said Patrick. "If this is the place, the art room's just beyond."

"If this is the place?" said Betty, bewildered.

"Of course it's the place!" Florence sprang ahead of Patrick to pass through a second narrow entrance. The place she found there was fitted with narrow shelves as for a commissary.

"Place has been ransacked," said Patrick as he followed in.

This was evident enough. Half the shelves had

been torn from the place. The floor was strewn with heavy, mildewed paper.

Florence bent over to examine one of the papers. As she straightened up a look of growing interest overspread her face.

"Patrick," she said, "were the bases of the statues round?"

"Bein' no artist and no close observer of such things, I can't say. Why, Miss?"

"You see," said Florence, "a number of articles have been resting on this paper that has evidently been dragged from a shelf. See!"

She held the paper up for inspection. Save for certain spots, the paper was heavily encrusted with dust. These spots, which were eight or ten in number, were all circular.

"You see," she said, "until to-day some objects rested on this paper, probably on the others as well. Someone has been here and carried those objects away."

"The gypsies!" breathed Betty, as if afraid she might be overheard. "I saw them. The sacks they carried on their backs were heavy. They came from here."

"The statuary," said Madame, "a piece of statuary usually stands on a narrow base."

"The statue of gold," said Betty sorrowfully. "It is gone!"

"We must find the gypsies," said Madame in a voice filled with determination. "We must demand that they return the statuary."

"We will not find them. They are far away by now. They know that Florence saw them. That's why the woman was angry and chased her," Betty said.

"We must follow them," said Madame.

"But these gypsies travel in a motor car," said Florence, "a sort of van. I was told that by the man in the garden. Fine chance we'd have of coming up with them in our slow moving pony cart."

At this point Patrick exploded a bomb shell in their midst. "I am not sure." He spoke quite deliberately. "I am not quite sure that this is the place at all. It—it don't seem quite natural. And yet," he mused, "ten years is a long, long time. And it was war, bloody war. When you're dead for sleep and expecting your head blown off

in the morning you're not likely to take much notice of the scenery."

"Of course it's the place," said Florence. "What else would there be worth carrying away?"

"And you can't deny something has been carried away!" argued Betty. "Something's gone. That's evident. Besides, I saw them carrying it."

"You may be right," said Patrick, who found himself in a real quandary. "You may be right. I'm not saying you might not be."

"Wha—what's that?" Florence had started to retrace her steps into the larger room, when some dark object darted across the floor.

"It's a rat," said Patrick, taking her place in the lead. "They grew big as cats in these dugouts."

"And that," he said, stopping short, "may be the way the gypsies found this place. The rats had a hole leading to the dugout. Find the hole; the rest is easy."

They struggled up the improvised ladder, then made their way silently down the hill. Their search seemed to have come to an end.

"It looks," said Florence to herself, "as if

we were defeated; yet you never can be too sure."

Strangely enough, at that moment there came to her mind's vision a picture of a beautiful blonde girl wearing a gypsy shawl.

"I wonder if she had a part in this," she thought. "It seems hard to believe. And yet Betty saw the shawl over the hole. It is a strange world. How is one to know who is friend and who is foe?"

CHAPTER IX

"THIS IS PARIS"

"THE GYPSIES," said Patrick, entering the cottage occupied by Madame and the girls, "have gone. They went toward Paris."

Madame and the girls, who were enjoying a before bedtime cup of hot chocolate, set down their cups and stared.

"Patrick," said Madame, "as a detective you are a fast worker."

And so he must have been, for he had left them in the dark at the foot of the hill less than a half hour before.

"Not so fast," grinned Patrick. "It's no trouble to find things out if you know who's to be asked. I come on some young Frenchies that's likely to be found most any fine evening sitting by the gypsies' camp when there's a camp to sit by, and I say,

" 'Where's th' gypsies?'

"And they reply, 'Gone in a big hurry. Gone toward Paris.'"

He sat down.

"They'd go to Paris," said Madame. "Paris is like New York or Chicago. If one wishes to lose himself, there he may do it quite handily."

"And that proves that they had the art treasure," said Betty.

"Not for sure," said Patrick. "This is the last of May. The great fair is on now. Gypsies go to Paris in May to put on their shows and to tell fortunes."

"It's true," said Madame. "We'd find them there, or somewhere along the road."

"And we'd know them at once by the crimson shawl," said Florence.

"And demand the art treasure." Betty began dancing up and down.

"We'll go to Paris," said Madame, "by train—to-morrow."

"To-morrow! To-morrow!" Betty's feet fairly flew in a wild dance. "Paris! Paris!" What had she not dreamed of that most famous, most beautiful city of the world?

"Paris!" she whispered, even as she fell asleep beside her pal in their narrow bedchamber beneath the eaves.

"I'll not be going with you," said Patrick next morning as he met his friends at the railway station a half mile from the village. Madame had offered to purchase a ticket for him, but he declined it.

"I don't like Paris; least of all in the springtime. Me for the open country. There'll be enough officers about Paris to help you get what you want, providing you find what you want."

"You don't seem to believe we'll find the art treasure," said Madame.

"Mebby I do and mebby I don't," he said without a smile.

However that might have been, as he saw the train round a curve on its way toward Paris, he hobbled back to the village to borrow a spade and make his way toward the hill, muttering as he did so.

"We'll see if any more of those trench rats have holes in the hill."

To Betty and Florence every fresh move, the

simplest possible affair, was an adventure. That ride to Paris! It was a revelation. Such a cozy compartment; just room for half a dozen people, and on this day occupied only by their party. Such soft broadcloth cushions. Such high backed seats.

"You could sleep here," said Betty, nestling down in a corner.

"And so they do, at night," said Madame, smiling. "But on such a day as this one does not care to sleep."

This was true. The world that sped swiftly by was beautiful with the glorious freshness of springtime. Canals where boats drifted lazily; pastures where cattle and sheep were watched by maidens who knitted beneath umbrellas; little factories, red-topped villages, roads filled with carts, autos and trucks; these were the objects that kept their eyes leaping first this way, then that as their train sped on.

"We should have gone to Paris before we finished with France," said Madame. "No one should miss it. The trouble with most Americans, they go to Paris and not any farther. Paris, they

say, is divine! Paris, they think, is France. But they are very wrong. Paris is not France, just as New York is not America, Chicago is not the middle west, San Francisco is not all of California. Of course, Paris is beautiful. And you must see it. There is no better time than springtime, the time for the great fair and carnival."

"But I have showed you rural France first," she went on after a pause, "because it is the most important and the most unseen. It is so with every land. It is the great misfortune, for in the country you find simplicity, kindness, happiness, quietness and beauty of nature. And these are the great gifts of God. How many of these do we find in Paris? We shall see."

As they neared Paris their train halted for a moment before a block signal in the open country. As she gazed out of the window Betty saw a truck, a heavy sort of camion with a strange, box-like body, passing down the road. The truck came to a halt not a hundred yards from them. A dark-faced man dismounted to examine his motor. A woman with a kerchief knotted over her hair,

dressed in a bright colored silk skirt, dismounted to come and stand beside him.

"Gypsies!" Betty said to herself. "The very ones. We are on the right track."

She felt an all but overpowering desire to open the door of their compartment, leap to the ground, and to demand the art treasure from these dark people.

The train started onward quite suddenly, and so this rash impulse died without result.

* * * * *

"So this is Paris!" It was three hours later. The train had whizzed into Paris; a curiously small taxi had whisked them away to the most wonderful hotel the girls had ever known, and here they were.

"Yes," said Madame quietly. "This is Paris at her best. There is more of Paris. Oh, very much more! And it is not all so good. But you must see the beautiful face of Paris before you see her back, which is perhaps not so beautiful."

"We are seeing it," said Betty with a sigh of satisfaction. They were seated in great, deep, softly upholstered chairs before towering French

windows that overlooked a beautiful garden. In one corner of this all but magic garden, fifty or more Parisian boys, quite gay in their scarfs of blue and red, were playing at hockey on stilts. Their happy shouts were carried to the window by a gentle breeze that blew from off the river.

At the very center of a great city, this garden offered every shade of green to the weary eye. Trees, bushes, shrubs and budding plants were to be seen. And among these were hundreds of pieces of statuary in gleaming white or modest gray and brown. Statues of great men, of noble women, of angles, fairies and goblings adorn this garden.

"Art," said Madame, sensing the spell which Paris had cast over her young friends, "in Paris all is for art. In America there are skyscrapers. In Paris there can be none. Why? Because it is not good for art. Architecture is a form of art. In her museums, her Opera, her Arc de Triomphe, her cathedrals, Paris believes she has art that has never been surpassed in any land. But if a skyscraper towers forty stories above the Arc de Triomphe—what then? It is not good.

"But come now." She arose. "It is time that we had our dinner. After that I must write some letters. And you, if you wish, may spend the early hours of evening strolling in the garden. It is quite safe. There is always plenty of light. Only please do not go too far away. Do not by any chance cross the river."

"The river," Betty thought to herself. "I must see that river."

Betty, as you know from the book called "The Thirteenth Ring," had lived much of her life on the banks of a river. A river to her was a thing quite alive. No other touch of nature—trees, clouds, hills, mountain—could mean half as much to her as a river.

* * * * *

Back in the little village that nestled among the hills, Patrick O'Farrel returned to his lodging after a day of hunting rat holes. It seemed quite evident that he had found no place to dig.

"The gypsies didn't find it. I'll find it yet, you'll see!" he told the spade as he threw that inoffensive tool into a corner and went to his supper.

CHAPTER X

A SHADOW PASSES

"COME," said Betty. "There is one thing I want so much to do."

They had wandered for an hour in the beautiful garden. Now, save for the spots brilliantly illuminated by electric lights, the park was quite dark.

"What do you want to do?" Florence asked.

"Sit by the river."

"By the river?"

"Why not?"

"But there is a wall, a massive stone wall. It is a long way down to the river. You cannot jump. You'd break your neck."

"But there must be a way down. There must be! There always is a way down by a bridge. And it is such a beautiful river. Just think! They have left it room to flow between sandy banks, where grass grows and wild flowers bloom

in the springtime. And in the heart of a great city. Just think what it will mean to say when you get home, 'I sat on the banks of the Seine, in the heart of Paris, at night!' "

"But won't it be dangerous?"

"There is no one to harm us. I saw from the window. Even in the daytime the banks of the river were deserted. There were boats passing, that was all. And they will but add to the beauty and romance of it all. Come! Let's go!" She tugged hard at her stout companion's sleeve.

"All right. We will."

So they left the garden, found the street leading to the bridge and joined the gay throng that walked the promenade.

To find a stone abutment that formed a sort of massive stairway down to the river's brink; to clamber over the railing unobserved, then to disappear into the darkness that was the night shadow of the bridge, was something of a task. It was accomplished at last, and with a sigh of satisfaction Betty allowed her feet to sink into the sand that formed the bank of the river Seine.

After walking for a distance of a hundred

yards through the dead grass that grew above the narrow strip of sand, they came at last to a spot where the bank sloped very gradually. There a stretch of sand very like a beach lay before them, and beyond that lay the silent, sullen sweep of the river.

"Here," whispered Betty.

For a time they sat there in silence. At their backs the lights of the great gay city shone out, fairly dispelling the night. Before them, far across the river, were other lights. A boat, some pleasure craft, floated silently past. The pedestrians on the bridge seemed to form a black, endless chain. Somewhere a taxi honked. Faint and from far away came the notes of some immense merry-go-round. Heard close at hand, these would have sounded discordant. At so great a distance, they seemed like sweet music. Clocks began to strike. A boom here, a far away chime there, they told their story. Then, save for the rush of the river and the murmur of the city, all was still.

"Most people love some object that is not human," Betty spoke softly. Perhaps she was

afraid of breaking the spell that was over all. "Some people have horses and dogs. Others are devoted to growing flowers. Some give their heart to a great tree. Joan of Arc was devoted to a tree that grew in a valley by her home. She went to watch the fairies play beneath the tree. For her the tree was a living thing; so too were the fairies. When the priest threw a spell over the fairies so they could not return to play under the tree, Joan was angry. Do you suppose we will ever find the statue of Joan, the statue of gold?" she asked.

"One never can tell," said Florence, softly.

"I hope we may. Oh, I hope we may!" Betty clasped her hands over one knee to rock back and forth. "I've always wanted to do something for someone else, always, all my life long. We are so selfish. We think so much of ourselves. Only to-day I looked in a shop window where a marvelous dress of purple silk was displayed and I said, 'If only I could take that home and say to my friends, 'I brought this from Paris!' How gorgeous!

"But you know, I'd rather find that statue of gold and the other things of bronze and marble.

The people in that little village are so poor since their treasure was stolen. Think what it would mean to those boys and girls to exchange their black frocks for beautiful ones, red, green, orange and blue! Think how they would shout if they found fruit and cakes on their table to go with their black bread and thick porridge!"

"We may find it yet," said Florence thoughtfully. "We—"

She broke short off to listen. Footsteps were approaching. Bending far back in the tall, dead grass, they sat there motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. A dark figure was approaching. Who was it? A policeman patrolling the river? Would they be arrested? An Apache, one of those terrible underworld characters one reads of? Were they in great peril? Betty regretted her rashness in bringing her friend to this lonely spot.

Through her mind ran all the stories she had read of Paris. She saw Javert, the implacable detective, follow Jean Val Jean from the mouth of a sewer. Again, for her, the terrible Hunchback of Notre Dame threw molten lead from the

parapets of the Cathedral down upon the heads of his pursuers.

And the Ghost, that fearsome Phantom of the Opera! She pinched her friend's arm until it hurt, then found herself ready to scream or to flee.

But the person, whoever it might be, was passing. It was a woman. She passed, a dark, mysterious shadow, close to the river's brink, and did not appear conscious of their presence.

Yet, strange to say, when she reached the bridge she disappeared into the shadows; nor did they catch sight of her climbing the massive stairs, as they must have done had she begun the ascent.

"Is she gone?" Betty asked. Her tones were tense.

"Where to? She cannot pass beneath the bridge. She has not gone up."

As if for protection, Betty moved close to her strong companion.

"I was going to tell you." She spoke in a tone that was little more than a whisper. "Some people love dogs or horses. Some love mountains and some love trees. I love a river most of all. It

is so full of life. It moves—moves. And it is always going somewhere. Always. Always! I, too, want to be going somewhere, all my life. Always. Then when my time comes to take my longest journey of all to the place some people call Heaven, I can say, 'Who's afraid? It's just one more little journey into a strange land.'"

"Has she gone?" she asked anxiously a moment later.

"I didn't see her go. It is dark by the bridge. She must have gone by now. Come!" Florence rose. "We must be going too. Madame will be worried about us."

Betty shuddered a little as she rose. "Come on," she with a laugh that was a little off key. "Who's afraid? Let's go."

There was no one in sight as they approached the great stone stairway, yet Betty shuddered again. Well she might. Hardly had their feet touched the stone floor of the bridge than a dark shadow began ascending. Having passed lightly over the railing, this shadow, all unobserved, proceeded to follow them until they turned in at their hotel.

Arrived at the great door into which the girls had disappared, the dark figure paused to stand there staring and rubbing claw-like hands together.

At last she uttered some low exclamation which caused a passer-by to pause and stare into her dark face.

"A gypsy," the man muttered as he strode on.

The woman crossed the street to stand for a time in the shadows cast by a clump of bushes. As Florence and Betty stepped out upon the balcony of their suite for a last look at Paris before retiring, she again uttered a low gutteral sound that might have indicated surprise or joy, or perhaps just nothing at all. Then turning, she melted into the darkness.

CHAPTER XI

BETTY ENTERS AN UNKNOWN WORLD

A CONSIDERABLE time after Madame had retired for the night, the two girls might have been found still sitting on the balcony breathing in the night air of Paris. The gleam of light, the murmur of voices, the general air of thrill and mystery that is Paris. Ah, who can describe it?

At times they conversed in low tones. At others they sat there in silence, absorbing the atmosphere of this most wonderful of cities.

"The Opera," said Betty, as a shudder shook her slight frame. "The Paris Opera. What charm, what mystery, what intriguing secrets must be hidden there."

"Why do you think so?" Florence's tone showed surprise.

"You have not read that book, 'The Phantom of the Opera'?"

"No."

"Then you would not know." Betty stretched her feet straight out before her, stared at the city lights for a moment, then said in even, but mysterious tone:

"There was a ghost in the Opera. And the Opera is such a magnificent place for a ghost. Such secret chambers and passages that opened through a mirror that swung about only at the touch of a secret spring! Such cellars, fifty feet and more in depth. Cellars filled with all manner of make believe things, villages, castles, wells, forests, gardens, all done for the Opera and stored there waiting their turn.

"And dressing rooms!" Her eyes were half closed now. "Hundreds of dressing rooms for the artists, secret dressing rooms for some. And the hall for the dancers. And the stage, only half lit or not lit at all, with great rows of seats and boxes staring empty-eyed from the dark. How I'd love to see it all, just as it was pictured in that book.

"And I shall!" She suddenly sprang to her feet. "I shall see it all. Perhaps to-morrow."

"To-morrow," said Florence, "we will go to the great street fair with Madame. There we will find our gypsies, the dark one who wished to kill me, and the blonde one with the crimson shawl."

"Do you really think that girl is a gypsy?" said Betty.

"She wears a gypsy shawl. We have always seen her with the gypsies, except once, the time I saw her crying her eyes out on the steps of the ruined chateau. That was strange."

"Do you think they have the art treasure and the statue of gold?"

"I do."

"Will we be able to save it for those people of the little village?"

"Who knows? They are bold, bad people, these gypsies. Everyone knows that."

For a time they sat there in silence. It was Betty who spoke at last. Once more her tone was deep with mystery.

"The Ghost had a palace beneath the Opera, a beautifuly furnished palace at the edge of a small lake beneath the opera. And in the palace was a torture room, a horrible horrible torture

room where the Ghost could roast you alive and at the same time make you believe you were famishing of thirst on a great barren desert."

"Not really!" Florence stared at her.

"In that book," replied Betty. "I don't know how much of it was real. Much of it must have been. Is there a lake beneath the Opera? I don't know. I mean to find out. I will find out. I will see it all, perhaps to-morrow."

"To-morrow," Florence reminded her once more, "we are going to the Fair."

"Yes, but there is a great deal of to-morrow. There is a great deal of every to-morrow."

"I suppose," said Florence, laughing as she arose from her place, "there will not be much of this to-morrow if we do not go to bed. We will sleep half of it away."

The *Fete Forane* does not open until noon. It was two o'clock when they arrived at the Avenue DeNuilly, the scene of the great street fair. Street fairs everywhere reach their wildest moments in the night, but even at this hour this affair, which is the wildest and gayest of all France, had ttained a pitch of excitement and

din sufficient to frighten and bewilder the astonished girls.

"We shall never find those gypsies," said Betty, staring first to the right, then to the left at row on row of camions, booths, tents and merry-go-rounds that stretched on and on as far as eye could see.

"Patience!" counseled Madame. "They are here. We shall find them. Never fear."

"Where do they come from?" Florence asked in amazement as she stared in blank astonishment at the motley array of portable amusements. Theatres, ginger-bread booths, wild animal shows, merry-go-rounds, towering amusement affairs on which women and children rode laughing and shrieking; all these were to be seen and many more. At the back of all were gypsy-like vans, for all the amusements were portable. This month they were here. Next month, who knows? In Toul, perhaps, or on the shores of the far away Mediterranean.

"Where do they come from?" Madame smiled. "They come from everywhere. They go everywhere. Some, it is true, stay always in Paris.

But let us go. We must find our true gypsies. They are always to be found here."

However that might be, they walked the long mile of the street fair and back again without catching sight of the dark gypsy woman or the blonde girl with crimson shawl. Gypsies there were, and plenty. Here a family had pitched a tent and were selling baskets. Another gypsy booth displayed flower stands made of willow branches. A third was doing a slow business at telling fortunes.

"Fortunes in the daytime!" Madame made a face. "They are no good in the daytime. It is only at night that they must come true. Fortunes are a mystery. Only at night does one find mystery."

"Perhaps," said Florence, "the gypsies we are looking for know this is true. They may be sleeping now. To-night we will find that dark one telling fortunes."

"It may be," said Madame. "And who knows too but they may be off somewhere selling treasures of art?"

"Who knows?" The girl's heart sank.

"We will come once more, to-night," said Madame.

"We must!" Florence returned stoutly.

As for Betty, she allowed her eyes to wander up and down the long row of booths where clowns were capering, women dancing and barkers shouting, then turned wearily away. She hated noise and dirt. Here was plenty of each.

"I want," she said slowly, "to see something quiet and truly beautiful. If we are not to see this, then what is Paris for?

"Of course," she added in a changed tone, "I want to find the statue of gold and the other treasures; but now I am tired—tired of all this."

"Ah yes, poor child!" Madame placed an arm gently on her shoulder. "We will go now. And if to-night it is your wish to rest, then Florence and I shall come without you."

Betty's vitality was of the sort that ebbed and flowed like the waves of a restless sea. Back at the richly funished room of their hotel she had not rested for a half hour before she was up and eager to be away on some fresh adventure.

"I would like to visit the Opera," she said.

"But I have letters that must be written," said Madame.

"So have I," echoed Florence.

"But why must you have company?" said Madame. "It is but a short way. In Chicago or New York in broad daylight you would think nothing of six or seven blocks alone. Indeed you would not. It is the same in Paris. Exactly. You will not have the least trouble. When you leave the hotel you turn to the left, two blocks more. At this you come to a street that cuts across at a sharp angle. This is the Avenue de l'Opera. It is three blocks, or only two after that? I cannot recall. At any rate, you cannot miss it. You will see it, and you will say, 'This is the Opera!' Indeed you will. For there are the great stone steps, the massive pillars, the walls built of stone from many lands. There is no building quite like this one. And in all the world no Opera quite so grand.

"You will not lose your way," she added as Betty drew a light wrap about her shoulders. "But if you should, why there are in this part of Paris English speaking people everywhere, in

every shop. Every one! For do not the Americans spend millions in Paris each year? Ah, yes! You have only to ask. They will direct you."

"Are you going with us to the fair to-night?" Florence asked.

Betty paused with her hand on the doorlatch. "I—I don't want to. Do you like the noise?"

"Yes," Florence laughed, "I think I do. The whole thing is so beautifully wild. It is as if one were let loose among savages in the heart of Africa or something. It must be grand and glorious at night. Besides," she added in another tone, "we must find the gypsies."

"Must I go?" Betty's brow wrinkled.

"Mais non!" exclaimed Madame. "We can do all that is to be done, Miss Florence and I.

"But," she added as the door swung open and the out-of-doors awaited Betty's eager feet, "if you are the least bit late you will not find us here. This is the night of what you would call the torchlight procession. That is something grand. We must not miss that."

"Don't wait for me. I'll be all right," said

Betty. "I've a fine new book to read, and as for dining alone, I'd love it." She was away.

The Opera, which was begun during the reign of Napoleon and completed by the French Republic, fulfilled all the expectations of this romantic young American girl. Its beauty entranced her, its massive pillars and domes awed her as no building in the world had ever done. For all that, it was not the exterior that interested her. She desired most of all to enter the Opera, to enter when no performance was in progress, when the auditorium was shrouded in darkness, when only a little light shone in the foyer and all the long row of dressing rooms were closed.

"There are two hundred and fifty-three doors," she told herself. "Think of the secrets those doors have hidden from the world during all these long years."

Once more she recalled the Opera "Ghost" and shuddered. Neverthless, it was the very descriptions of the Opera to be found in this unusual book that had filled her with a consuming desire to see it as the ghost had seen it, and as Christine

Daae and her lover had seen it many years before.

"I will not go up the great steps," she told herself. "I will try to find the smaller side entrance."

In this she was successful. Who can describe her feelings as she stood before this door? Beyond that door lay a world of which she had dreamed for many long months. Who is there among us but has dreamed at one time or another of visiting some particular spot? Perhaps it was a mountain we were to climb, a cave we were to enter, a great ship to be gone through, or a jungle to explore. With Betty it had been the Paris Opera. And now, here she stood. The door, for all she knew, was locked; probably was. She did not put out a hand to try it. She dared not. Should it give to her touch she would enter. This she knew well enough; yet above all things in this world, she dreaded entering that door.

"I wish," in her intense excitement she spoke aloud without willing it, "I wish I might enter that door."

"Then," said a voice directly behind her, "why should you not enter?"

Startled, Betty wheeled about to find herself staring at, of all persons in the world, the blonde girl of the crimson shawl.

"Come," said the blonde girl, stepping past her and laying a hand on the door. "We will enter. What could be simpler?"

The heavy door swung open. Scarcely willing to do so, obeying impulse alone, Betty followed. With an audible click, the door closed behind her.

"For better or for worse," she whispered to herself, "I am here."

Then a thought struck her all of a heap. The girl who moved before her, who proposed to act as her guide, was the blonde gypsy. "I will ask her about the statue of gold," she told herself. "But first I must see the Opera."

CHAPTER XII

A WIERD DANCE

HOW OFTEN it happens in life that the surroundings that charm us most fill our hearts with fear. The shadows about a camp in the heart of a jungle at night; eyes that gleam out of the Great White Silence that is the North; the voices of a forest at night—all these charm us as they cause us to tremble. It was so with Betty and the Opera. Nothing could have so charmed her as that very place. Yet, as she entered her knees trembled and she experienced great difficulty in preventing her teeth from chattering. Why? Because of the Opera Ghost. For her the Ghost existed not only in a book, but in reality as well. And ghosts, as you well know, do not perish. They are immortal.

In silence, trembling yet full of determination, she followed her strange guide. They passed through one of the two hundred and fifty-three

doors to find themselves in a long, narrow corridor. Doors confronted them on every hand. Betty expected the girl to hesitate before choosing the next one. She did not pause for a single second.

"This way," she whispered. Three things surprised Betty: her calm assurance, her perfect knowledge of the place, and the fact that she spoke English. She had believed her more or less a stranger to the Opera, for how could such an obscure person be expected to know her way about in such a grand edifice? She had believed the girl a gypsy.

"And gypsies do not speak such perfect English," she told herself. "Not in France."

"This way." She followed on. A third door closed softly behind them and they were in a room of considerable size. Its floor glistened darkly in the dull light. Its walls, which seemed half mirrors, reflected this dull light.

"The hall of the dancers," she told herself.

They moved silently across this floor. The blonde girl's step betrayed a certain eagerness. Her "This way, please" was neglected as she

opened the next door to allow Betty to enter ahead of her.

"Little wonder," thought Betty as she suppressed a gasp. They were now on the stage of the best known, most beautiful show house of the world, the Paris Opera. And the stage was set for a performance, set with a castle that in the dim gloom of the place seemed as real as any castle of stone in all the world.

It was strange. Walking a bit unsteadily, Betty dropped at last to a place of rest on the lower step of a great flight of stairs that led up and up to a massive door that was swung wide open, revealing magnificent furnishings of ancient design.

Before them, receding into the dark and gloomy distance, were row on row of seats. And above these, seeming never to end, were more and yet more.

"It's wierd to be here alone with her—with this girl," Betty told herself with a shudder.

As she glanced about she realized that they were not quite alone. Off to the left was a man. Half hidden in the shadows, motionless, he seemed at first only a statue. Yet, even as she

thought him a bit of stage "property" he moved an arm. There was another man below, just before the orchestra pit.

"Watchmen," Betty thought. "Or stage hands. Wonder why they do not tell us to go away?"

She was to wonder still further. As she sat there speculating as to what was to be the next move in this curious adventure, the look on the blonde girl's face changed. It was as if she had suddenly gone into a trance. The change frightened Betty. She wanted to spring to her feet and run away. But which way should she run?

"More than two hundred and fifty doors," she told herself. "And we passed through four. Which four? How am I to know?

"Besides," she told herself, clenching her fists tight to strengthen her resolve, "I must know her secret. She must tell me about the statue of gold."

Even as she thought this the other girl moved forward to a spot where a wierd sort of half light painted a patch of greenish yellow on the space before the castle. There she began to dance.

A wierd, fantastic dance it was, slow, solemn, graceful.

"Oriental," Betty whispered. She wondered if this could be one of those all but forgotten dances brought hundreds of years ago over weary miles to France.

"She dances as if she had a partner, a very heavy, clumsy partner. But she dances divinely," Betty thought. "If she truly had such a partner he would but enhance the charm of her own action."

But now the blonde girl's dance was ended. With a last wild whirl, she appeared to draw a shawl from her shoulders, swing it gracefully about her, send it spinning to the floor, then drop lightly upon it.

"The crimson shawl," thought Betty. The thing was so real, the mimicry so perfect that for a space of seconds she fancied that the shawl was really there.

Then the charm was broken. Leaping to her feet, the girl bowed to an invisible audience. She bowed again and again. Then kissing her hand, she flung her arms wide to turn and go flying up the stairs to disappear within the grey castle walls.

"The girl is a dancer of the Opera," thought Betty.

"But surely she cannot be, she who wanders over the country-side and fights with gypsies over a shawl. Surely—"

But a new thought gave her pause. The gypsy girl had vanished. Save for the dummy-like stage hands, she was alone, alone in this vast place of many doors.

Springing to her feet with a little cry, she was about to dash up the steps after the other girl when she saw her coming down the stairs.

She was walking slowly now, demurely, as if she were being led by the hand. Once more she advanced to the spot of the greenish yellow light. Again she bowed and kissed her hand. Once more she would have mounted the stairs had not Betty grasped her by the arm.

"Oh!" said the girl. Again, with a deep sighing breath, "Oh!"

In an instant the spell was broken. With eyes that appeared to understand, the blonde girl looked at Betty. Then with a quick turn about, she said, "Come!"

"It's the strangest thing I ever experienced," Betty told herself as she followed her guide through yet another of those many hundreds of doors.

For twenty minutes, without once speaking a word to her, this curious guide led Betty in and out, up and down the corridors and stairs of the Opera. Now among a labyrinth of dressing rooms, now in a dark corridor, now among the wings, and now moving from box to box, looking down upon the stage and its shadowy castle as in a dream, they wandered. Men were to be seen everywhere; doorkeepers, guards, firemen, stage hands. Not one of them all offered to stop them. If they chanced to be in the way, at sight of the blonde girl they moved aside.

"They know her," Betty concluded at last. "She knows this place as if it were her home.

"And why not her home?" she asked herself with a start. "Everyone knows that within the walls of this great edifice there are those who seldom leave except to buy food."

Now the blonde girl's mood changed. Her eyes lighted. Her pace quickened. She hurried

down a passageway, opened a door and began to climb. Nor did they pause until Betty, panting for breath, made one more plunge upward to find herself seated upon a ledge of stone, far, far above the city of Paris.

For a time she sat there motionless, striving to regain her breath and to still her heart's wild beating. The climb, together with the final sensation of great altitude had set her blood racing.

At last she lifted up her eyes to look about her, at the great guilded domes and the massive statuary that are the glory of the Great Paris Opera.

Most of all she wished to see the city and the sunset at this great height. She tried a few steps, found herself gaining courage, and at last moved quite calmly to a position where all Paris lay spread before her.

"Ah!" she breathed.

"Magnificent! Is it not so?" In the light of the setting sun the blonde girl's face fairly shone. One had no need for a second guess to know that this, of all others, was a favorite spot.

And why not? A little distance away, a ribbon of silver between threads of gray, the river wound its uneven way. Close at hand, where smoke arose and little engines, seeming at that great height but toys, drew tiny trains about, was the *Gare de l'Ouest.* Farther away, but looking dark and mysterious, was the great cathedral of Notre Dame. Betty shuddered at thought of it. She had read Victor Hugo's book, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," and found it both wonderful and horrible. She had seen the moving picture after the same name and had found it less wonderful, but ten times more horrible.

She put out a hand to steady herself and found the stone ledge damp.

"Must have rained while we were inside," she told herself. In this she was right. One of those sudden showers that visit Paris in springtime had sent the city toilers scurrying on their way home.

"And that," she told herself as a feeling of awe crept over her, "is Paris. Who could have guessed that a city with so beautiful a face, the Louvre, the *Jardin des Tuileries,* the wonderful

promenades, could after all be so much like other cities?"

She looked away into the distance where the houses and apartment buildings seemed mean, badly lighted and small; where the streets were mere alleys, and a feeling of sadness came over her.

The mood was instantly broken. There came to her sensitive ears the faint flapping of wings. A dark shadow passed over her. Looking up, she saw a giant raven soaring to a lighting place far above her on the lyre of Apollo, one of the massive statues of the place.

"It was here," she told herself, moving uneasily, "that the lovers in that wierd book met. And where the raven has come to rest is the very spot on which the Ghost bent his knee to lean far over and watch them."

All but overcome by the sudden recollection of a scene burned upon her brain by the words of the book, she sprang to her feet to demand that she be taken down at once.

Instantly her heart sank. The blonde girl had vanished. She was alone.

No, not quite alone; perhaps worse than alone. What was that she heard off to the right? Shuffling footsteps?

She was soon enough to know. Out of the shadows of gathering night a figure appeared, the bent and angular form of a woman.

For the moment that woman's face was hidden. Her identity was at once established by the wrap she wore, the crimson gypsy shawl.

A cry that formed in the girl's throat died on her lips. A hand was on her elbow. It was drawing her back into the shadows.

She turned her eyes about to find herself staring into the blonde girl's face, and that face was pale as death.

CHAPTER XIII

ABOVE A TRAP DOOR

NOTHING could have startled Betty more than the sudden appearance of the dark-eyed gypsy there at the top of the Opera. They were alone, she and the blonde girl. No men were here. Stage hands, foremen, guards, all were far below. This was the home only of bats, pigeons and ravens.

"It is a plot," was her first wild thought. "They have trapped me here, this girl and the gypsy. For what?" Her knees trembled with sudden violence.

One look at the white face of the blonde girl assured her that this could not be true.

"She is as much afraid as I," she told herself. Obeying the girl's urge, she glided noiselessly into the shadows of the stone pillar that supported Apollo and his lyre.

Apparently quite unconscious of their presence,

the gypsy woman took a few steps closer to the stone parapet. Then pausing, she turned to look down upon the city.

How different must have been the dark thoughts of this woman from that of the pure hearted, innocent girl who a few moments before had stood in exactly that spot. There was a sharp, cruel, hawk-like look on her face. Her eyes were hard, bright and glistening as a polished stone.

"She *is* like a hawk," Betty thought to herself, "a hawk scanning the sky for a defenseless pigeon.

"What if I should be the pigeon?" She shook from head to foot.

For a time she turned her eyes from this fear-inspiring person, to gaze up at the massive statue that towered above her.

To her vast surprise, when next she looked the gypsy was gone. A touch of scarlet, however, remained.

"The gypsy shawl," she told herself. "She has been out in the rain. Now she leaves it there to dry while she prowls about. She does not know we are here, believes she was alone," she told herself. "But how did she come here? And why?"

She had no time for working out a solution to these problems for once more she felt the grip of the blonde girl's hand on her arm.

"Be ready to fly," she hissed. Her eyes were not on Betty, but upon the gypsy shawl. Her face was aglow with wild excitement.

"W-where?" Betty whispered.

"There." The girl pointed to a trap door behind them which Betty had not seen.

The girl's next move was alarming. She darted, not toward the trap door, but away from it. With three bounds she was at the parapet. A snatch at the wall and the crimson shawl was in her hand. Three more wild leaps and she was again at Betty's side.

"Come! This way! There is not a second."

Before Betty could realize what was going on, she was half dragged through the trap door and down a narrow, dusty stair into a place that was quite dark.

"This way."

The girl's hand was once more on her arm.

"Step carefully. There are perhaps some loose boards."

In a general way Betty knew they were somewhere beneath the great roof of the Opera. That was all. There was nothing left but to follow her strange guide.

Her mind was in a whirl. What was this affair into which she had entered? Was she party to a theft, the theft of a priceless shawl? Or had she but witnessed the retrieving of a rich heirloom?

"Of the two," she told herself, "the dark gypsy seems the more likely to be the true owner. She is a gypsy; there is no questioning that. As for the blonde girl, who can know? Are there blonde gypsies? If not, if she is no gypsy, then by what strange chain of circumstances has she come into lawful possession of this priceless thing?"

All these thoughts raced through her mind as they moved slowly across a rough and uneven floor.

"Here!" the girl whispered. "Once more a trap door."

The second stairway led to a door. Once they had passed that door they found themselves in a dimly lighted corridor, facing again a score or more of doors.

As ever, the blonde girl seemed perfectly familiar with her surroundings. All but on the run, she sped down the corridor, then through a door, down a stair, another and yet another, across a broad space, then along a very narrow passage that was like the gangplank of a ship. Then, to Betty's amazement, she dropped on hands and knees, caught a circular rod, dropped her length, clung there for a second then let go.

"Come," she whispered. "I will catch you."

Betty obeyed. She was surprised at the strength of the arms that grasped her and let her gently down.

"Now," the girl breathed in a sigh of relief, "I think we have escaped her.

"But one never knows," she said in a scarcely audible tone a moment later. "These gypsies, they are everywhere at once."

"And are you not gypsy?" The question slipped unbidden from Betty's lips.

The girl's answer brought a great surprise.

"I wonder," she said thoughtfully. "What is it that makes one a gypsy? But come!" She took Betty's hand.

They descended a stairway and found themselves once more at the side of the make-believe castle that adorned the Opera stage.

Every moment of this strange affair brought some fresh surprise to Betty. Hardly had they reached the stage when, as if drawn by a force she could not resist, the blonde girl glided once again to the center of that bright spot and began to dance.

Even more graceful now was her dance. And the shawl, that before existed only in the imagination, was a reality.

So, apparently oblivious to all else, she danced on. From time to time she appeared to escape from her clumsy dream partner. During such moments as these she danced wildly. Swinging, bowing, whirling, she set the crimson shawl circling about her like a thing of burning fire.

For a time Betty felt ill at ease.

"These gypsies," the blonde girl had said, "are everywhere at the same time." She feared that the dark woman might come upon them. She had not forgotten the long knife Patrick had taken from that woman.

"Probably has another by now." Her heart fluttered at the thought.

The dreamy whirl of the dancer, the drowsy silence of the place, allayed her fears. At last she fell to musing on the scenes that had been enacted here.

"Upon this stage," she thought, "lovers have quarreled and embraced. They have sung their songs and taken fond farewells. Here kings have lost their thrones and princesses have languished in prison. What a wonderful place is the Opera! How I should like to see the glory and beauty of it all! The lights; the music; the bright, gay throngs; the scenes; the singing. Ah, how I wish—"

She broke short off from her revery to stare.

Before her the strange girl still whirled in that exotic dance. At her back the make-believe castle still posed in mimic grandeur. For all this a startling change was taking place. The auditorium, the rows and rows of seats, the balconies, the boxes, were vanishing. And in their place came a blank, black wall.

She tried to scream:

"We are sinking!" The words stuck in her throat.

And still, apparently quite unconscious of it all, the strange girl danced on.

Then of a sudden, as on that other occasion, she whirled about, spread her shawl, dropped upon it, rose to bow low and wave her shawl. Then before Betty could cry out, she was away up those dark steps and lost from sight.

"Gone!"

Betty was quite beside herself. Here she was standing before a castle that was sinking, sinking, sinking. And she was alone. She wanted to scream, yet she could not. Her throat was dry, her lips paralyzed.

While she stood there quite paralyzed with fright, the blonde girl calmly reappeared.

"We—we are sinking!" Betty cried.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle,*" the girl said quietly. "It is the way of the stage. To-night there will be on the stage not a castle, but a garden. Come, we are down. We sink no more. We must go away. We will hinder their work. This set must be moved aside, another put in its place.

"This cellar," she said as she pushed open a door, "this very, very wonderful cellar, is filled with sets and scenes most gorgeous. You might spend one hundred hours in this place. But we will not spend one hour. Let us go."

So that was it! Betty's head whirled. The stage and its setting had been lowered. A fresh setting must take its place. And now they were in the deep cellar of the Opera.

At once she was seized with fresh terror. In this cellar it was, by an underground lake, that the famous Ghost had taken up his abode.

"But that," she told herself, "was all pure fancy, taken from an author's mad dreams."

For all that she could not entirely shake off her fears. She was glad enough when they moved forward.

"She said we would not spend an hour here, the blonde girl said that," she reassured herself. "What could she mean but that we would leave the place at once?"

The course they took now was a zigzag one. It needs must be, for they passed between rows of stage settings. Some were small, some very

large. Here they passed a rustic cottage, there a wall; here a vine-clad hill, and there a well curb, and there the mill at which Sampson ground. All these done in paper, Plaster of Paris, and paint, seemed very real in the half light that was all about them.

"I must ask her about the statue of gold," Betty said to herself. But somehow, at that moment the words would not come. In a place so silent, so deserted, so much like the settings of a planet other than her own, words seemed out of place.

Then, out of that silence there stole a sound, a dull rumble of thunder far, far away, yet continuous. No, not quite continuous, yet more so than thunder.

"It is a stage trick," she told herself. "Someone is trying it out."

As they went on the sound grew louder. "That's strange!" she told herself. "We are getting farther and farther from the stage. Why should it increase?"

"This way," the blonde girl murmured. They passed down a narrow corridor.

"That door." This time the blonde girl did

not lead. She allowed Betty to pass. She motioned her to lift the latch.

"What now?" thought Betty with a heart beat that was painful.

She put out a hand. The latch gave to her touch. The door swung open. Hardly knowing what she was about, she stepped through that door and heard it close behind her.

At once she found herself in the midst of what to her, coming as she did from the semi-darkness of the cellar, seemed a blaze of light.

"The torture chamber!" she thought in renewed terror. This lasted for an instant. Then she laughed. She was standing upon the platform of a subway station. At that moment a train was passing.

"It was the roar of the trains we heard," she told herself. "I have heard that three subway tubes pass under the Opera.

"But the girl!" she exclaimed in a low voice. "The blonde girl! Where is she?"

Of a sudden she realized that the girl had not followed her from the Opera cellar.

Turning, she tried the door.

"Locked," she murmured after shaking it hard. "Locked! She is gone. And I did not ask her about the statue of gold! What an opportunity! And now it is gone, perhaps forever. How can Florence and Madame ever forgive me? And Patrick, poor Patrick O'Farrel!" She could have wept.

In another moment her sense of humor returned. She thew back her head and laughed. Betty was like that; sunshine and showers.

"We'll find out about the statue of gold," she told herself. "Perhaps Madame and Betty will discover the gypsy van to-night.

"But now," she thought, "I must be getting back. Which way does my train go?"

Her French was bad. She did not know how very, very bad it was. No American who has been in France a month knows that. She tried to ask the girl at the window where she purchased her ticket for the station of the Tuileries.

The girl stared at her in astonishment. Then, as she repeated the question, appeared to understand and pointed to a train that had just stopped.

Betty stepped inside the center car, the one with seats. Some had only iron posts to which you might cling as you stood up.

She rode a long way. Her station did not appear. At last, just as she was about to despair, she thought she saw the sign flash by. Leaping to her feet she dashed out of the car and up the steps to darkness and the city streets.

But what was this? Surely this was not the station by the public garden.

"Too dark. Too many buildings," she thought.

Without thinking very much, she began to walk. In a very short time she had completely lost herself in the very heart of Paris at night.

"Lost!" she told herself as the realization came to her with the force of a blow. "Lost, and in such a place!" All about her in the narrow streets were signs of poverty and want.

"Who knows?" she said with a fresh shudder. "These may be the homes of Apaches, the terrible ones of Paris."

CHAPTER XIV

LOST IN PARIS AT NIGHT

IN THE meantime, stout-hearted and happy Florence, with the dignified Madame at her side, had plunged into the wildest revel it had been her privilege to experience, for the *Fete Forane* at its height is wilder than anything known in any land.

For a time they stood in line watching the curious torchlight procession pass by. What a strange mixture of dignity and abandon it was. Here grave men in light top hats rode in gorgeous French cars. There a clown leaped high in air to do a cart wheel and a handspring, then to balance a large paper horn on his nose. Here two ponderous elephants marched with shambling tread, and there ten dancing girls bestowed smiles and threw kisses to the screaming multitude. Bears, monkeys, gypsies, boys on stilts, all these added to the garish spectacle.

"We will not remain long here," said Madame. "That which we came to seek may be more easily found when the throng is not so great."

Knowing that she spoke of the gypsies and the statue of gold, Florence readily agreed.

To pass along a street thronged with speculators, watching a procession, is no easy task in any city. How much worse in Paris, where the most excitable people in the world have gone mad over spring fever and the great fair.

"My faith!" exclaimed Madame after twenty minutes of vain struggle. "We shall never get anywhere. Let us sit here and eat gingerbread until the procession is ended. Then we have only to flow with them like two buckets of water in a river, wherever they wish to take us."

Florence consumed five gingerbread pigs with pink frosting on their backs, then she sat for a time watching the throng.

And what a sight it was! Men, women and children of all ages and classes. Here a peasant woman from the hills; there two petite girls from the department store; there three heavy faced men from the factories; and here a bevy of girls under

twelve years of age holding hands and keeping a nursemaid in a frenzy of fear lest she lose one of them.

"Mostly working folks," Florence thought to herself. "One thinks of Paris as a place of continual gayety where all is art, laughter and song; yet even here men, women and children carry on their faces the marks of toil. What a strange world it is. Gay Paree! I wonder if anywhere in the world all the people are ever gay? I wonder—"

"Come," said Madame. "The last of the procession has passed. The stream now begins to flow. We will flow with it, down the Avenue de Nuilley."

With the passing of the parade, the throng broke away and began moving along the avenue. It flowed like a river. As a river breaking over rocks tossed and torn roars its way on to the sea, so this human river burst into a roar that was deafening as it leaped and raced its way on to the wild amusements that were before it.

Pressed in between a beautiful girl with flowing hair and a blue coated soldier, Florence strove

to maintain her position in the throng and never lose track of her friend. At the same time, with the buoyant spirit of youth she was drinking in the thrills of a Paris festival at night.

Florence had seen much of life. She had swarmed with the multitudes on New England's most popular beach. She had known the wildest nights in Coney Island, and the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. These she had thought at times were wild. Never would she think this again. Paris this night was a hundred Coney Islands rolled into one. Surging down the Avenue, the merry mad crowd flooded the amusement corners. Mammoth merry-go-rounds where zebras, horses and goats vied with pink pigs, filled the air with discordant sounds. A great organ operated by steam drowned out even this wild music. Men shouted, women screamed. Old women danced and whole companies burst into songs.

When every amusement place was crowded, the throng broke into little groups. In the center of each group someone sang or danced or played for the coppers that were thrown to them.

Florence began studying those who pressed

upon her. A young girl, barely more than fifteen, crowded past her. Two others followed. Their lips were parted, their eyes shone like stars. A wild frenzy appeared to have seized them. The first of the three screamed, the second laughed, the third embraced a stranger, then went laughing away.

"Look at them," said Florence to Madame. "Are they happy?"

"Who?"

"All of them."

"Perhaps. Who shall say? At least they are excited. And in this little world of humdrum toil and little amusement that, at least, is something. We must not begrudge them their little thrills."

"No," said Florence. "I do not begrudge. Somehow, it makes me feel that I too should like for once to get quite foolish with excitement. But look!" she said in a tense whisper. "Is not this our gypsy van?"

"It is, I do believe," said Madame, allowing herself to be drawn a little way from the throng to a spot where a gypsy fortune teller's tent had

been set up. At the back of the tent was a motorized gypsy van.

"Listen!" Florence said in a tone that was low and full of meaning. "I will go in and have my fortune told. And all the time I will have my eyes with me. If they have the treasure in the tent—"

"No! No! It will not be safe!" Madame strove to break in. But Florence had already disappeared behind the walls of the gypsy tent.

* * * * *

At the moment Florence entered the gypsy tent, Betty was moving on tiptoe down a dark and narrow street. Fear beset her on every side. She was on a strange street in an apparently terrible quarter of Paris. What was still worse, she was unable to make a single soul understand what she wished or where she would go.

Recalling what Madame had said about the shop keepers speaking English, she had entered the shops. A bakery, a grocery, a coffee shop she had visited one after the other and had endeavored to ask her way. In each of these she was met with blank astonishment. They did not

speak English, these keepers of dingy little shops. For all the effect her words had upon them, she might as well have spoken in Eskimo or Chinese. The part of Paris Madame had spoken of was far, far away. In these quarters, inhabited only by the poor and perhaps even worse than poor, where tourists never came to see the sights, what use did the shopkeeper have for a knowledge of English? So again, again and yet again she emerged into the outer darkness that was a Paris street at night.

"Lost!" she said. "What shall I do?"

She hugged the buildings as she walked on, hoping in this way to escape notice. But even here a slim, stoop shouldered youth with an evil eye flashed his light full in her face to leer at her, and an ancient hag peered up into her eyes, to pat her on the shoulder and mutter something in French.

She paused in a dark corner to think. What could she do? There seemed nothing for it but to spend the night on some doorstep.

And she was hungry. It came to her quite suddenly that she had eaten no dinner.

"Well, there are the shops," she told herself.

She retraced her steps to the bakery she had but lately visited. A bell jangled above her head as she entered, for in these small shops the lady clerk is also mother, matron and housekeeper of the home at the back of the shop.

Without a word Betty put down a five france piece and pointed at some breadsticks the size of a man's thumb and long as a child's arm.

The woman asked a question in French. Not knowing the answer, Betty pointed again at the tempting little long loaves of bread.

With a toss of her head the woman produced a page from some newspaper and seizing a whole armful of breadsticks, rolled them up and lay them down before the astonished girl.

It is safe to say that Betty never, never in her life possessed so much bread. Not knowing what else to do, she wrapped her slender arms about the bundle and made her way once more into the street. There, in spite of herself, she laughed aloud.

"If there are beggars about I surely can feed them." She laughed again, and felt better.

But what was this? There came a rattle and rumble from the street. Crowding back against the wall, she waited. There loomed out of the darkness a two-wheeled cart. It was pushed by a man or a woman; in the darkness Betty could not tell which. It was followed by another and yet another. A whole procession of them, thirty or forty, loomed one at a time before her to vanish into the gloom. These were the fruit venders, the bread venders, the candy sellers of Paris returning late from a long day of toil. Before the dawn of next day they would pass again to one more day of labor.

Had she known of the procession, at once dignified, gay and wild, which her friends had seen that night, she might have drawn a strange contrast. She had not seen, so as the last cart passed she fell in behind and, still hugging her burden of bread, followed after.

In her mind she had formed a plan. "In every section of every city," she told herself, "there are homes, real homes of honest people. Not all blinds are drawn, nor all shutters closed. I will look in at the windows until I have found the

home of an honest and happy family. Then I will sit down on their doorstep. If anyone offers to harm me I will pound on their door and appeal for aid."

How was she to know that a family was honest? That to her was an absurdly simple problem. "Only honest people," she told herself, "are truly happy. If they seem contented and happy round the evening lamp, they must surely be honest."

In good time she found the home she sought. Through an open window she saw four shadowy faces grouped about one uncertain light. A man, a woman, a boy and a girl were there. The man sat half asleep after a day of heavy toil. The woman's fingers moved rhythmically over clicking needles. The boy's head was bent over a tattered book. The girl nursed a doll. Despite the evident poverty, the poor light, the plain, patched clothing, the all too thin faces, there was about the scene a suggestion of infinite peace.

Into Betty's mind there came a picture of that wild scene at the street fair.

"How much better!" she murmured. "How much happier are these!" Whereupon, she seated

herself at their narrow doorstep and began to munch a breadstick with as much relish as she might had it been a jelly roll, for contentment breeds contentment. Were all the world contented, all the world would be happy, whatever its lot.

What was it that caused the girl within that small room to leave her seat and look out of the window? Was it Providence? Did the kindly thought born in Betty's soul wing its way to her own? However that may be, she did look out and she saw Betty. And, feeling drawn to her and to her armful of breadsticks, she unbolted the door to step softly outside.

For a moment she stood there in silence. Betty, looking up at her, caught the look of longing she had fixed on those crisp, brown breadsticks.

"Want some?" she asked, holding them up.

"O, *Anglais!*" the girl exclaimed, springing back into the house.

"I have lost her," Betty thought.

She was wrong. In another moment the entire family quartette were framed in the doorway, and the man was saying in perfectly good English:

"What is it that you wish?

CHAPTER XV

THE UNFINISHED FORTUNE

WHEN Florence entered the gypsy tent on the avenue of the great street fair, she did so with little thought of danger. She was now in the heart of Paris. Thousands of honest hearted merrymakers thronged the avenue. How could one find danger here? Little did she realize that in the excitement and noise of the hour anything might happen and pass unnoticed. A scream for help, a death cry; who would hear or heed these with all the tumult that was on the avenue? "It is but part of the fun," they would say, and would pass on.

In every gypsy tent peril may lurk. Wanderers for hundreds of years, living without the law of every land, these strange people have at times turned brigands and robbers of the worst type. Always there is something uncanny and sinister about their dimly lighted tents in which they

foretell the future of any who will cross their palms with a coin.

Florence felt this uncanny, ghost-like air about the tent the moment she entered. Yet, so intent was she upon fulfilling her mission of searching the tent for the lost art treasure, without seeming to do so, that for a time she gave little thought to it.

The interior of the tent was disappointing. It was divided exactly in half by a red curtain. The half she had just entered was carpeted by rich appearing Oriental rugs. At the center of the space was a small table, curiously carved. With serpents twining up and down its legs and dragons' tongues protruding from its corners, this table fairly seemed to writhe.

At the back of the table sat a solitary figure. This figure, beyond doubt that of a woman, was shrouded in a large black shawl. From a narrow opening at the top of this shawl two dark eyes gleamed. That was all.

So disappointed was the girl with the barrenness of this place, so intrigued by thought of that which lay beyond the red curtain that, without

half willing to do so, she crossed the narrow space and put a hand to the curtain.

Then it was that she caught a sound. Quite inhuman, yet very startling was this sound, like the croak of an angry raven.

Turning quickly about, she found bead-like eyes from under a black shawl fastened on her.

"I—I beg your pardon!" she stammered. "I—I wanted to have my fortune told."

Not a sound came from within the shawl. Only a dark, claw-like hand reached out from the folds to point at the small stool that stood before the fantastically carved table.

"I have seen that hand before," the girl told herself. "There are few such hands in the world."

Hands, Florence well knew, tell quite as much of character as do faces. The shape of fingers, the nails, the very manner in which one carries his hands in repose, expose to the experienced observer one's whole life history.

Florence had suspected that this was the tent of the gypsies who had looted the buried dugout. There are, however, in every gypsy band several

women. She did not at once suspect this shrouded figure of being that one who had so nearly cost her her life on that lone hill country road. Had she done so, she would without doubt have refused to seat herself in that chair. As it was, she dropped silently into the place indicated by the hand, then sat waiting a bit breathlessly for the next move in this strange little drama.

Hardly had she seated herself when the hand stole once more from the black shawl. This time it rested, palm up, on the table.

"That hand!" thought Florence. Then with the force of a sudden shock it came to her. That hand had once wielded a dagger aimed at her own heart.

"But I must not let her guess that I know," she told herself, putting on her straightest face. "I must play this strange game through to the end."

With hands that trembled ever so slightly, she placed a five franc piece on the outstretched palm. The gypsy claw disappeared. Yet no sound came from within the shawl. Only the black eyes appeared to glow more fiercely.

Again the dark claw appeared. Once more Florence placed upon it a coin.

This time the shawl began to speak. The tone was low, deep, musical in a somber way.

"You are going on a long journey," said the voice from the shawl. "You will go far, far. You will not return. They say some do return, yet we do not see them. Bah! What is that?"

The dim light that stood on a stand of beaten iron beside the table appeared to grow dimmer. Yet no hand touched it.

"How wierd!" thought the girl. She found herself trembling.

"Where you are going," the voice chanted on, "there is music, slow music and flowers, many flowers. And do I see earth, fresh earth? Yes, there is much fresh earth."

"She is speaking of the buried dugout," thought Florence. "I wonder if she will tell me of the buried treasure. Perhaps they do not have it, after all. It may yet be hidden beneath the sod of that hillside."

Then of a sudden her keen eyes noticed that which set her blood running cold. A movement

of sinister stealth had begun beneath the black shawl.

"The claw, the gypsy claw," she thought.

Then suddenly her heart stopped, then sent her blood racing. The black shawl had parted ever so slightly, revealing some object white as death.

"Ivory!" she told herself. "The ivory hilt of a knife!"

With a light bound such as only a girl of Florence's type could execute, she was off the chair and back to the center of the room.

The black eyes burned like fire. The voice did not lose its chant:

"You are going on a long, long journey. Perhaps not to-night. But soon. Soon. Where you are going there will be music, slow music. And flowers, many flowers. Do I see earth? Yes, yes, much damp earth."

It came to Florence with much force that this strange creature spoke not of a dugout but a grave, an open grave—*her* grave.

"Perhaps," said the creature of the shawl in an altered tone, "you would wish to return at another time to have your fortune finished. It

is well. You cross the palm with a coin. You learn many, many things."

"No!" Florence fairly screamed. "I will never return. You are a robber, an assassin! I will never return!"

Her scream was lost in the noise of the merry-making throng, as any other scream might have been.

As she left the tent she felt the cool night air of Paris on her burning cheek, sensed the sights and sounds of mad revel, and felt that she had in a second's time entered another world. As indeed she had.

* * * * *

How different was the experience of Betty at this same hour. She was seated at a small table with her new friends around her. They were drinking hot chocolate and munching crisp bread sticks.

The man of this little family, she had discovered, had been all through the terrible war. He had escaped with but slight wounds. Being little more than a boy at that time, and having been stationed for some time with the American

troops, he had picked up a knowledge of the English language.

"To find one who speaks my own tongue in such a street," Betty had said to him with a smile, "is like finding a home on a desert island."

"Ah, yes. So it is," he had replied. "Yet we too have found a friend."

When she had asked for a cup of hot chocolate and had learned that these people were too poor to afford either chocolate or milk, save a tiny bit of milk for the morning porridge, she had sent the girl with a ten franc note for a supply of both.

Over a tiny charcoal fire the mother heated the milk, stirred in the chocolate, and here they were, quite a happy party, enjoying a late evening feast and quite forgetting that some others might be worrying about a girl who was missing in the great city of Paris at night.

"And you wish to go to the Hotel Wagram on the Rue de Rivoli?" said the French father at last. "Nothing is simpler. I myself will take you there at once, by the subway. No! No! It is nothing!" He waved Betty's protest aside. "You have been kind. We are humble people,

yet we try to love well all those who are our friends. Not," he added as they rose to depart, "not that you would be in the least danger. We who live on this street are poor, very poor indeed. But we are also honest. No one here will harm you. Everyone here will help you if he can."

So they walked to the subway and were soon rumbling along through the subway to the Rue de Rivoli.

* * * * *

When Florence found Madame she poured a startling tale into her listening ear.

"We must find the police!" said the girl excitedly. "She would have murdered me! I am sure of it!"

"Indeed yes!" agreed Madame. "I am quite sure it is true. And yet, what have you? You saw something of ivory. You cannot prove this. She did not threaten you. She told your fortune, assured you that you were going on a long journey. Is it not so? How many have been told the same? A million people, I do believe. What a picture then we will play before the Paris police. We should get nowhere. Come! Let us go home.

We will finish with the gypsy at another time."

By great good fortune they came upon Betty just as she was bidding adieu to her humble guide and pressing a coin into his unwilling hand at the hotel entrance.

What tales the two girls had to tell as once more they sat upon the veranda overlooking Paris.

"She said I was to die!" Florence exclaimed. "She meant to kill me. And think how easy! With all that wild noise outside!"

Betty shuddered. She too had encountered the gypsy woman that night.

"But," she said quite suddenly, "it could not have been an hour after I saw her when you found her in that tent in quite another quarter of the city."

"These gypsies," said Florence, "are witches. They have wings."

Betty recalled the blonde girl's words: "These gypsies, they are everywhere at the same time."

"Florence," she asked, "do you think the blonde girl is a gypsy?"

"Who knows?"

"To whom does the crimson shawl belong?"

Again her companion answered, "Who knows?"

"And what is one to think of that blonde girl's familiarity with the Opera? How is it that everyone there appears to know her? And why did she dance so strangely and wonderfully there in the wierd light?"

"You know more about that than I do. You were there," said Florence. "It has been a long day. I am going to bed."

"I'll come very soon," said Betty. "I want to sit for a little while and think."

Her thoughts were soon interrupted by Madame, who came out upon the balcony for a breath of air before retiring.

"It seems," said Betty with a sigh, "that tonight we are further and further from finding the statue of gold that ever before."

"Perhaps," said Madame in a tone deep with meaning, "this is true. Perhaps quite the contrary. Who can say? I, my child, have lived a long time. One thing I have learned, and it has brought me much comfort. When our cherished dreams have lain buried for a long time they have a way of springing up like flowers in

the springtime to surprise and bless us. It is God's way."

For some time after that they sat there in silence.

"It is strange," Betty mused at last, "that I should have come upon those simple, kindly, honest people to-night, just when I needed them most."

"It is not strange," said Madame, sitting up in her chair. "The world is made up of such people as these; simple, kindly, honest folks. Look about you. They are everywhere. In Paris, Berlin, Chicago, everywhere it is the same. One person in a thousand is rich. These, they are what you may call, the society. They count for very much among themselves. But that is all. One person in a hundred is dishonest, a robber, a villain perhaps. These should be locked up. But all the rest of the world, they are simple, kindly, honest, toiling people. Is it not wonderful and beautiful that it should be so? Yes indeed! Come! Let us go in. To-morrow is another day."

CHAPTER XVI

WHENCE CAME THE GYPSIES?

NEXT morning as the two girls and their enjoyable French companion sat sipping their coffee which had been brought to them on a tray, Florence repeated a question asked some time before.

"Madame, where did the gypsies come from?"

Madame smiled. "That is a question which I have been looking into a little. See! Here is a book. I found it in the shop down the street. It is written by one who himself is part gypsy, and who has traveled with them in many places. They have been thought of as Egyptians. That's why they are called gypsies. E is left off in the beginning and t-i-a-n-s becomes s-i-e-s. But this man, he believes they are a people of a lower caste who were driven from India long, long ago.

"Their coming to Europe is strangely dramatic. Let me read you what is recorded here. It is

taken from manuscripts that are very, very old indeed and are authentic beyond a shadow of doubt. Listen to this:

"'In the course of the year 1417 there appeared in Germany a horde of men, sunburned, dressed in rags of all colors, followed by a still greater number of women even more poorly dressed than the men. They thronged the roads and invaded the homes of people, spreading terror everywhere and begging or stealing everything they saw. At the head of the mob there were a dozen men on horseback, who distinguished themselves from the rest by wearing scarlet. These leaders had falcons perched on their wrists, packs of hunting dogs at their sides and were comporting themselves with the airs and manners of nobles. They bore letters from Emperor Sigismund and other princes permitting them to pass through towns and provinces.

"'These people formed huge flocks of wanderers which swarmed down upon the peasants' huts as they were in the field, and robbed them.

"'At the fairs, while the men bartered and swindled, the women practiced sorcery and magic

upon the credulous peasants and their wives, skilfully emptying their pockets.

"'When questioned, the strangers claimed to hail from Lower Egypt; that they had been condemned to a seven-year exile to atone for sins committed by their ancestors. So great was the superstition awakened by these strange people and so intense was the fear of them, it was considered a crime to do violence to these gypsies. This left them free to rob, steal and commit violence without hindrance.'

"That," said Madame, closing the book, "is the story of the coming of the gypsies to Europe. And that, as you will see, was more than five hundred years ago. They are still with us. There are more than a million of them in the world today. And what country does not know them? They are everywhere.

"They came to France after Germany; then to Italy. When they arrived in Spain, direct from Italy, they carried letters supposed to have been written by the Pope, giving them the freedom of Europe and ordering each Bishop to pay them ten pounds.

"They have always claimed to possess strange powers; to be able to read the future, to bring good fortune to their friends and catastrophe upon their enemies.

"They have never settled for long in one place. They have ever been charged with treachery and secret evil doings.

"And such," she ended, "are the people you go to visit." She turned a smiling face upon Florence. "Do you go once more?"

Florence did not smile. "I want," she replied in a tone that was steady and serious, "to find the art treasure, the statue of gold. And in the end, God helping me, I will."

"Good girl! Very well said. Here's to success!" She held her cup high. They drank solemnly.

"But for all this," she counseled a moment later, "you must be very, very careful, for truly these are treacherous people, ready if they dare, not alone to stick you in the back, but to carry you away alive. And after that to ask of your friends a very great ransom."

"I will be careful," said Florence. "But to-

night I shall return to the *Fete Forane* and perhaps to the tent of the gypsy."

"The tent of the gypsy? After what has happened already?" Madame elevated her eyebrows.

"I will be careful, very, very careful," Florence repeated.

"To-night," said Madame, "is the very last night of the fair. It will be wild indeed."

"I think I'll go too." Betty's eyes shone with an unusual light as she spoke.

"Then we shall all go," said Madame.

"The last wild night," murmured Florence.

After that they sipped coffee and munched toast in silence.

* * * * *

At this same hour Patrick O'Farrel might have been seen stumping his way up the ridge that lay above the village of Morey. In his one free hand he carried a shovel.

Since the happy trio left the hills he had spent all his waking hours searching the hills for rat holes, but without success.

Once indeed he had varied his program a little.

He had returned to the dugout looted by the gypsies. There he had wandered in and out among the narrow rooms and had spent some time examining the papers on which the busts and the statue of gold were supposed to have reposed for so long.

That same afternoon, on leaving his lodging, he had thrust a large black bottle in his pocket. The bottle was empty. The cork was gone. With this bottle still in his pocket he had once more entered the dugout. When a half hour later he climbed laboriously up the improvised ladder, the bottle was gone. He had left it in the dugout. On his lips was a smile. This smile was soon replaced by a look of grim determination. From that time his energy was expended in searching for rat holes. One might have supposed that he had learned something of great importance on his second visit to the dugout. If this was true, he imparted the knowledge to no one.

CHAPTER XVII

A WATCHER IS WATCHED

FLORENCE trembled a little as she once more entered the wild throng at the street fair. She was thinking of the adventure that had befallen her on the previous night. And yet, strange to relate, she had not been on the avenue an hour before she had once more plunged herself head foremost into one more desperate adventure. Such is the spirit of youth.

On this night everyone was in costume and mask. At least everyone had donned a mask. The happy trio had borrowed black gowns from chambermaids at the hotel, and had purchased black masks at a little shop close by.

"Now," Florence had said as she stared at herself in the glass before leaving the hotel, "I can have my fortune told safely enough. My own mother would not know me; how much less a gypsy who has seen me but two or three times."

"But you would not try that again!" Betty exclaimed.

"Who can say what one will do on such a night as this? I am told that it will be the wildest night Paris has ever known."

"That," said Madame quietly, "can hardly be true. Think of Armistice night.

"And yet," she mused, "there was a great sadness then as well as great joy. There were many, many fresh graves. The grass is grown upon them now. So Paris is perhaps to be gayer and wilder to-night than on that other night."

The night was indeed a wild one. Throngs of masked merrymakers swept here and there like great waves of the sea. Confetti flew through the air like snow flakes. Streamers of red, blue and green, every hue of the rainbow, adorned every post, wire and booth.

Here an unusual amusement drew the throng like a magnet. There some happening, a fight, an arrest, someone down and trampled upon, caused the crowds to bank into a solid wall of humanity.

It was into one of these walls that the three,

still clinging desperately to one another, were suddenly caught.

The cause of this sudden gathering was a girl and a bear. They were dancing. The girl, slight and frail looking, had drawn a bright red gown over her street dress. As a mask she wore a sort of red hood that covered not alone her face, but her hair.

The throng had pressed back to give this strange pair room to perform.

And now the dance began. The girl displayed a grace quite remarkable to see in one of her profession. The clumsiness of the bear brought out her grace as nothing else could.

The throng went wild with approval. It shouted and screamed. It showered the pavement with coins.

"See!" said Florence. "How wonderfully she performs!"

"I can't see," said Betty, standing on tiptoe. "Here. I will hold you up."

Florence's strong arms were about her. Up she went. After the ovation accorded her, the girl was dancing again.

"How—how graceful! How wonderful! How like—"

She tried to think what it was like. Then, like a flash of light, it came to her. It was like that blonde girl dancing in the Opera.

"And she danced as if she had a bear as a companion," she told herself as a thrill ran up her spine. Her head was in a whirl. Could this be the same girl, the blonde gypsy? It did not seem possible, and yet—

But what was happening now? There was a sound of sudden commotion. In her circling, the graceful dancer had moved close to the ring-side. A young Frenchman, drunk perhaps on liquor, perhaps only with wild excitement, suddenly threw out his arms and caught her round the waist. She let out a low scream. That instant a swarthy man with the arms and shoulders of a blacksmith and the face of a gypsy seized the youth by both shoulders and threw him over his head.

The youth landed full upon the defenseless heads and shoulders of the massed spectators. Then such a scrambling! The show was over.

Some fresh excitement beckoned. The trio were released. They were free to seek fresh fields of adventure. But in Betty's mind there remained an interesting question.

Fresh fields of adventure were not lacking. They had not wandered for a quarter of an hour from booth to booth before they found themselves before the tent of the gypsy fortune teller who had twice threatened Florence's life.

"Shall I go in?" she asked. "She would never know me in this costume."

"You forget," said Madame, "that hands are quite as expressive of character as faces. Gypsies have read hands for hundreds of years. Do you think for one single moment that this gypsy would not know your hand? Truly, I believe she would know it in a glove!"

"I know," said the girl, quite undaunted, "the treasure is at the back of the tent. There will be no one at the back of the tent at this hour. The women are telling fortunes. The men are out picking pockets, like as not. Surely they are not here. I will creep under the back wall and have a look."

"But do be careful!" pleaded Madame.

"There's no danger. If anyone comes I will get out. I am quicker than any gypsy. You two can keep watch."

The thing seemed simple enough. In spite of the fact that a throng was continually passing before it, and those desiring fortunes told constantly bobbing in and out of the tent, at the back of it there was no one. The spot directly behind it was quite shrouded in darkness. What could be easier than to lift the loose canvas and peer inside? If someone were there, one had only to drop the canvas and disappear. If not, an inspection of the place, with an avenue of escape always at hand, would be simple enough. At least this was the way Florence reasoned it through. If Betty and Madame did not quite come to see it in that light, their eager desire to discover the art treasure and the statue of gold won them over.

"I will watch at the front," said Madame at last. "If any gypsies enter that way I will warn you. And you, Betty, keep an eye on the back.

"A fine undertaking for a woman and two girls," she muttered half to herself. "But how

else is it to be done? You cannot ask for a right of search by the police without bringing the whole affair to light. And who would do that? Indeed, yes. Who?"

When the stage was set, Florence lifted the canvas wall and looked within. For a time she could see little. The dim, wierd light from the fortune teller's lamp shone but feebly through the canvas partition.

"Dark," she whispered. "Can't see a thing."

Then, as her eyes became accustomed to the light, "Two bulks over there. Things covered by a canvas. No one there. Might as well get in."

After drawing a long breath, she lifted the canvas a trifle higher, dropped to her knees, and crept inside.

There, for a full moment she remained silent as a statue, listening, waiting the stilling of her heart's wild beating.

Then of a sudden her heart gave a painful leap. She had heard words distinctly spoken.

"You are going on a long journey." This was the sentence pronounced.

She had heard those words the night before,

and had seen the hilt of a dagger. Now here she was alone, and was hearing them again. She wanted to fly.

"Bah!" she told herself. "That witch of a gypsy is telling a fortune to some innocent soul. Fortunes are all the same. I will not run. I will find out what I want to know!" With this resolve strongly made she moved stealthily over the rug strewn floor of the gypsy tent.

In the meantime, in the darkness at the back of the tent, Betty was experiencing strange sensations. Did she have what is known as a presentiment, or was it just a case of nerves? She could not tell. She had been up late the night before. Paris had acted strangely upon her. Whatever it might be, she was quite overcome with the notion that she was being watched, that something quite terrible was about to happen to her. What? She could not tell. For all that, she felt cold perspiration starting out on her forehead. Her knees trembled horribly.

She looked all about her. To her back, not ten feet away and up a little from the ground, a dark hole yawned, the entrance to a gypsy van,

the motorized van that had brought the gypsies to this fair.

"And the art treasure as well," she told herself. "At least we shall soon know. I—I must stand my ground. I—I must not fail my good pal."

So in the end, though she felt an all but overpowering desire to flee, to leap into the throng and lose herself as a bird loses itself in the clouds, she stood her ground, watching and waiting, fearing and hoping.

And Florence, within the tent, with trembling fingers lifted a square of canvas to find herself looking upon a heap of large black bottles.

"Only bottles," she murmured under her breath. Even in this half light she was able to spell out the large letters. "Whisky bottles. Try the other pile. Perhaps it—"

She broke short off. Had her keen eyes caught a faint movement? Not a doubt of it. As she wheeled about she found a pair of burning eyes fixed upon her.

At that same instant, back there in the dark by the tent Betty felt the overpowering strength

of two arms wrapped about her and a hand pressed to her mouth before she could scream. Less than a moment later, with her mouth securely gagged and some powerful person working to bind her hands and feet, she found herself lying on the floor of the motorized gypsy van. And that van was beginning to move slowly forward.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GYPSY LAUGHS

WHEN Florence so suddenly became aware of her danger, her eyes instinctively followed the line of parted curtains to the waist-line of the person whose haw-like eyes watched her. At once her terror was redoubled, for she caught the gleam of polished ivory.

"The knife!" She had been discovered by the black-robed fortune teller.

Courage rises with danger. An instinct of self preservation caused her to reach down and grip the neck of a black bottle. Instantly it came to her that here was a perfect weapon. The woman was three paces away.

"One step forward, and this crashes against your forehead!" The girl's tone was steady and deep.

What she said she knew well were not idle words. Trained as she had been on field and in

gymnasium, she had arms with the strength of a man. Skill was hers too. Two seasons she had pitched ball for her girls base-ball team. Her aim would be true. But would she throw?

She answered the question at once. She would. This woman, who had twice attempted her life, was not fit to live. Let Providence decide how well her skull might resist the blow; she would get it, never fear.

The woman appeared to understand. She did not move; merely stood there with burning eyes staring.

Presently Florence began to speak.

"I came here to look for something. If it is here, you have no right to it. By keeping it you are robbing women and children of their bread. Yet you would do that. You are that kind. When I am through with my search I—"

She paused. From without had come the sound of a purring motor. It was strange. The motorized van. But why starting now?

The gypsy woman heard. A look of fiendish glee overspread her face. Florence was dumbfounded.

She did not finish her sentence. Instead, still gripping the bottle tightly in her right hand, she kicked away the canvas covering of the second heap on the tent floor.

She uncovered, not the art treasure, but a miscellaneous assortment of camp equipment: kettles, pans, a small sheet iron stove, odds and ends of everything.

"It—it is not here," she murmured.

"No," the woman spoke at last, "it is not here. It has never been here. Ah!" Her voice took on a mocking tone as the sound of the motor died away in the distance. "You will have need of much treasure, very much treasure. And perhaps you do not have it. And then—" She laughed a hoarse laugh.

What did all this mean? The girl's heart was in her throat. For all this, her head was clear. She was not to be trapped. Still gripping the neck of the black bottle, she crept backward out of the tent.

Once outside she breathed more easily. But not for long. The van was gone. Where was Betty?

"Madame! Madame!" she called.

"Here! Here! Is that you, Florence?"

"Where is Betty?"

"Betty?"

"She is gone!"

"She was here."

"Yes, but now she is gone." Florence recalled the sound of a purring motor, the fiendish look on the woman's dark face, and like a flash it all came to her.

"Betty!" she fairly screamed. "She has been kidnapped by the gypsies! Quick! We must notify the police!"

Notifying the police in a strange, foreign city on the wildest night of the year is a difficult task. Two hours passed before the proper authorities had been notified. Even then they took only a sleepy interest in the affair. A young lady lost at the fair? Had not a hundred people been lost in that mad throng on this very night?

"They will all be at home in the morning, Madame," the Prefect of Police assured them. "They will come back. It is always so. You will find your friend in the morning. Always, always

it has come out this way. However, we will be on the watch."

And all this time a motorized gypsy van was rapidly making its way toward the outskirts of the city. An hour had not passed before the last house was passed and they were in the open country. The road they took led directly to the far off French border.

In the back of that van rode the unhappiest, most terror-stricken girl in all France. Nor was she alone. Upon the blankets in that great black cavity rode another. Who was this second person? To this question Betty could frame no sort of answer. By sound, slight movements and other disturbances she knew she was not alone, that was all. Nor did this knowledge in the least degree lessen the terror that gripped her heart.

* * * * *

"Madame," Florence's tone was deep and troubled, "why have the gypsies been allowed to roam the earth all these centuries?"

Madame did not answer at once. Her heart was heavy. They had done all that they could. It was not two o'clock in the morning. They

could not hope to do more before morning. Meanwhile there was nothing left but to retire for the night. They were not in the mood for sleep, so here they sat—waiting.

"They have not always," Madame spoke at last in a tone that was full of meaning. "The time was when in our beloved France gypsies were hunted and killed as are the wolves in Russia. There was a bounty on every gypsy head. And yet they did not entirely leave this beautiful land. But do you think that was a good law which permitted them to be hunted like wolves?"

"Perhaps not. But of what use are they? How do they help the world?"

"Who can say? Did you not enjoy our little wanderings in our high-wheeled cart?"

"Didn't I though!" Florence exclaimed. "I only wish we were back there in the hills with our pony and cart right now. And if Betty were with us, life would be complete. And I wish, Oh, how I wish, we had never so much as heard of the statue of gold!"

"Come, come!" said Madame, laying a hand gently on her shoulder. "Do not be so unhappy.

Surely all will be well in the end. Do you not see that there is a touch of the primitive in us all; that we all have a secret longing for the wild gypsy life? This must go back hundreds of years to the time when our ancestors dressed in skins and lived here, there, everywhere, herding goats, fishing and hunting.

"Perhaps it is not so bad that these strange gypsy folks should keep longings alive in our souls. The factory, the big store, the shop, they are not good for us all the time. We need the color of green grass and trees and the glory of sunset in our eyes. We need the sweet scent of cherry blossoms and of new mown hay. And how shall we who live always in great cities know all these things unless we wander now and then?

"More than that," her tone grew more deeply serious, "still more than that, these people, these strange gypsies, were put into the world by the Creator. He has ordained that they shall wander. Who are we that we should question His wisdom? They themselves, in the very beginning, announced that they had been sent to wander for seven years because of sin. They still wander and

always will. And that is as much as we may ever know."

"But that," said Florence in a low, distressed voice, "does not bring back our Betty."

"No," said Madame solemnly, "it does not."

"You will recall," said Madame after a moment's silence, "that I warned you some time ago. Indeed, it was when first you saw the crimson shawl, that these gypsies were bad, that they were not to be trifled with, that it is better, very much better, to leave them alone."

"I remember," said Florence, softly.

"They are a strange people," Madame went on. "For me, there has been about them something of the uncanny. I cannot pass them but I feel half bewitched by them. In earlier days, as I once told you, they were greatly feared because they were supposed to be possessed of strange and terrible powers, witchcraft and sorcery. To-day we do not all believe in those things.

"But this," she leaned forward in her chair. "This I have seen with my own eyes. When I was a child I lived in the high Alps, in Switzerland. In that country also there are gypsies.

They are everywhere. In Switzerland there is not much wealth. The land is very poor.

"Once a gypsy stole from a poor man who had very little. He took two chickens. The poor man was angry. In the night he cut the ropes of the gypsies' horses and allowed them to wander away. Next morning I was standing by the gypsy campfire when this Swiss peasant drove by in his milk cart.

"'See!' said the black gypsy, fixing his eyes on the peasant's horse, 'That man's horse is going to stop. He will not go.'

"And what do you think? The horse stopped so short that all the milk was spilled on the ground! And after that he would not budge. Not an inch would he go. Not until the peasant had caught the gypsies' horse and brought them back, and until he gave them two chickens to go with the ones that had been stolen. I have seen this. When the gypsy told the peasant's horse to go, then he went well enough; but not before. I have seen it. What do you say to that? If it is witchcraft, then what do you say? Oh, these gypsies are strange ones, I tell you."

Madame looked at Florence. Then realizing that all this was working undue havoc on her sensitive nerves, she changed the subject and spoke of pleasant things, of future wanderings, and of their return to America. After that she suggested sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT DAYLIGHT REVEALED

WHO CAN picture the terror and despair that filled Betty's heart as she felt herself being hurried away in that gypsy van to an unknown destination?

"Where are they taking me?" She asked this question over and over. "Why are they carrying me away? And who can this person be who is so near and yet so silent?"

To this last question she could form no answer. That the van had two windows, she knew well enough, for she recalled noting with interest the lace curtains that adorned them. That these windows were fitted with shades or blinds she was forced to conclude, for in spite of the fact that they were now rolling along in the open country and that there must be a bright moon, not one ray of light entered the place.

"Perhaps," she told herself, "this other person

is being carried away as I am." There was a crumb of comfort in this. "Companions in misery."

Once a rather fantastic thought came to her: Florence had been captured within the tent and had been spirited away to the van. It was Florence who now and then stirred beneath the blankets close beside her. This, of course, she realized was pure fancy.

"May be only some gypsy woman who sleeps while I lie here awake and frightened half out of my life." This thought made her angry. Betty had black hair and snapping black eyes. She could become intensely angry on occasion.

"I won't be frightened," she thought, clenching her fists. "I won't! I won't! They may do what they will!"

Anger in the dark alone soon consumes itself, and leaves its victim weak and meek, ready for reflection.

"If Florence had not assisted that blonde girl in the road," she thought to herself, "and if we had not attempted to help Patrick O'Farrel find the art treasure, the gypsies would never have

been conscious of us, and I would not be here."

She meditated for a time upon this. In the end she concluded that, were the whole little life drama to be played over again, she would not have it differently. She had once heard a great and good man say, "Nothing in this world matters half so much as that the simple, kindly, honest folks who do the work of the world shall be honestly paid and that they shall enjoy their few possessions, in peace."

"We have been trying to make this come true," she told herself as a feeling of warmth stole through her being. "I believe that blonde girl is simple, kindly and honest. She believed the shawl honestly belonged to her. Florence had only helped her to retain possession of it. The art treasure belonged to those poor villagers. To restore it would be to renew joy and health to a few hundred simple, kindly folk. Yes," she told herself solemnly, "we would do it again."

But why, after all, were the gypsies carrying her away? Was the art treasure in their tent? Were they afraid it would be found if she and her companions remained in Paris?

"That," she told herself, "doesn't seem reasonable. If they remain in Paris now, the police will know of my disappearance and will raid their tent and discover the art treasure."

Truth was that the Paris police did visit the scene of Betty's disappearance two hours after the van rolled away. They found a spot where a tent had stood. That was all. They made little of this, however, for since this had been the last night of the fair, the whole avenue was like an army corps breaking camp.

"We were staying at an expensive hotel," Betty thought. "They may believe that my people are rich. They may hold me for ransom. Ransom!"

She thought of her one-time home on the banks of the Chicago River, and smiled in spite of her dilemma.

"Perhaps," she thought again, "they have not found the treasure, but hope to. In that case, one band would keep Madame and Florence busy searching for poor little me, while the others searched the hills."

None of these solutions to the problem quite satisfied her. In the end, she gave it up and

settled back as best she could, with hands and feet fettered, to rest.

"To-morrow," she told herself, "will bring fresh troubles and mystery. I must rest."

Mile on mile the van rattled on. At times they halted. The greater number of these pauses were caused by a railway crossing and a passing train. She could hear the clank of the iron gate and the increasing rumble of the train; then they would roll on again.

Twice as they paused there came the sound of voices. "Some sleepy town watchman questioning them," she thought. "If only they would open the door and look within!"

Each time her hopes rose at the sound of voices, each time fell as they went speeding on.

Then came a time when hope rose to fever heat. Dawn was coming. A faint light shone here and there through a crack. As they came to a sudden halt, she realized that they must be near some border of France.

"We have traveled swiftly all night," she told herself. "Will we enter Germany, Switzerland or Spain?"

To this question she could form no answer. Of one thing she was sure, as the driver dismounted and walked away: they were at some border.

"If only they expect contraband goods," she thought. "If the officers look within—

"But then," she told herself, "they may only require to see their papers and ask them whether they are carrying tobacco, arms or liquor.

"If only I could make a noise," she thought with renewed hope. In this she utterly failed. After tying her hand and foot and gagging her, the gypsy captor had rolled her round and round with heavy blankets. Thresh about as she might, she could not produce the least sound.

And then the motor began to purr. They were away. Hope ebbed lower than before. They had entered a strange land. What land? Why? What would come next?

In her frantic efforts to make her presence in the van known, she was quite unconscious of the fact that enough of the light of breaking day had crept into the van to render objects visible. The realization of this came to her with something of a shock. Instinctively she turned her eyes toward

the spot whence had come those mysterious movements in the night. Who can describe her surprise upon finding herself looking into the eyes of the blonde girl with the gypsy shawl.

Then what emotions filled her heart! Surprise, joy, compassion, all vied for control of her being. Surprise that this person of all others should be her companion in misery (for the blonde girl also was bound and gagged), joy at finding such a friend in suffering, compassion for the other, these were the emotions that filled her soul to overflowing.

And in the other girl's eyes, to her great joy, she read in swift passing succession these same emotions.

"It is like finding a friend on a desert island," she told herself. "Whatever happens to us, I am sure we are going to love one another."

CHAPTER XX

"I AM BEHARI"

MORNING found Madame and Florence wide awake. True, they had slept only a short time, but Betty, their friend and boon companion, was lost. No stone must be left unturned. She must be found.

After a hasty cup of coffee they were away again to the Prefect of Police.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Not yet returned? Bah! That is bad!"

"It is the gypsies," said Madame.

"The gypsies! Then that is worse. They are gone. Last night that avenue was full of them. Now, like the birds in autumn, they are gone. Where? Who can say? Germany? Perhaps. Switzerland? Spain? Who knows?" He spread his arms wide.

"But stay!" he exclaimed. "There is an open field beyond the fortifications of the city, a per-

manent camp of these people, a sort of inn for them. Would you know these gypsies if you saw them?"

"Indeed yes!"

"Then I will send you there with an escort of police at once. You shall see them all."

He pounded on his desk. A very dapper young officer appeared.

"You will lead these ladies to the outer gate to the camp of gypsies," directed the Prefect.

Bowing, the officer motioned Madame and Florence to follow.

Outside they found a powerful police car in waiting. They were soon speeding toward the outer gates of Paris.

"This," said Florence, smiling is defiance of her great unhappiness, "is the first time I have ever ridden in a police car. And to think that it should happen in Paris! What an adventure if it were not so serious!"

"Yes. Yes, indeed." Madame sighed and smiled.

Almost before they could realize it, they were at the outskirts of the city, then turning into the

open field. There they found the gypsy encampment. Here were at least a hundred tents, camp wagons and barracks. Some were clean; others dirty. Children were everywhere. Little black-eyed creatures they were. "Some of them," Florence said in a low tone to Madame, "are very beautiful."

"Yes, yes," said Madame with a touch of impatience. "But we must find the ones we seek."

The foremost camp wagon was raised high on piles.

"This," the young police officer explained, "is the home of the chief. He is very grand. Oh yes, very grand indeed! See the bright hangings at his door and the curtains at the windows. Ah! There we have it. It is well that we speak to him of our mission. It is he who owns all these tents and barracks; he who rents space for wagons camping. He knows all."

The Chief, a handsome, dark man with a pointed beard, appeared at his doorway. He scowled at sight of the officer, but seemed pleased by the presence of ladies.

"No! No!" he said when Madame had finished

describing the gypsies of the motorized van. "They have not been here. They do not come. Indeed, they are not welcome. They are a bad lot.

"You doubt my word!" He turned an angry countenance upon the young officer. "Very well. Look for yourself." With a sweeping gesture, he included all his camp. Then bowing to the ladies, he retired behind his rich portieres.

"I do not question his word," said the young officer. "He has never been known to tell an untruth to the police. However, there is no harm in looking about."

They walked in a leisurely manner about the camp. In this way they came at last to a spot where three forges were glowing and three hammers smiting anvils lustily.

"The gypsies," said Madame, pausing before the picturesque scene of three dark men, with brown arms bare, moulding steel into horseshoes, "were first of all smiths. Good ones they were too. In the age of chivalry, many is the broad sword they have forged. Who knows but Richard Cour de Lion wielded one of their blades?"

Florence was not listening. Instead, she stood staring at the most powerful blacksmith of the three. She was puzzled.

"He has a familiar look," she told herself. "Where have I seen him before?"

Then as her eyes wandered for an instant, she started afresh, for there not ten feet from her, curled up under a tree fast asleep, was a large brown bear.

At sight of the bear it all came to her. This was the bear with which the girl in the red gown and mask had danced, and this the man who had thrown the impudent French youth over his head into the crowd at the fair.

"Tell him," she commanded Madame, "that we saw him at the fair when he threw that fellow over his head."

The man's face was a study as he received the message. He appeared to be experiencing an inward struggle. At last his face broke into a smile as he demanded,

"And did he not deserve it?"

"Indeed! Indeed he did," Florence and Madame answered in unison.

It was strange, but somehow Florence felt that this man might be able to aid them.

"Madame," she said quietly, "would you tell him of our great misfortune?"

"Yes, if you feel that this will help."

Seating herself on a log, Madame began the story. As she went forward with the narrative the gypsy blacksmith unconsciously pumped away at his forge until the fire took on an angry white-hot glow. His face too appeared to take on the angry heat of the forge.

Scarcely was Madame's story finished that the swarthy blacksmith lifted a great hammer and beat his anvil to such purpose that Florence put fingers to ears that she might save her eardrums.

Instantly men, women and children, all of them gypsies apparently of this man's tribe, came running from all directions. Women, hands white with bread dough, stood before him. So to did children scarcely clad at all.

Then began such a speech as Florence had never heard. True, she understood not a word of it, for it was spoken in the native gypsy tongue. This did not detract one whit from its power.

Such vehemence! Such bitter anger! Such explosion of vowels and consonants! She had never heard the like in her life.

As this speech ended the dusky band dispersed on the run. In less than a moment Florence realized by their actions that their camp was to be struck at once. Tents came down. Fires were stamped out. Horses were caught and harnessed.

Turning to Madame, and speaking now in French, the powerful smith struck his hairy chest as he exclaimed:

"I am Behari! I have heard that which you say. I understand as you cannot. You are not a Romany as I.

"See!" He pointed at the sleeping bear. "He belongs to *le petite* Jeanne. *Le petite* Jeanne has been kidnaped and carried away by that wicked woman, Panna, and her band."

"Where have they gone?"

He held up a hand for silence. "Who can say? But I—I am Behari. Europe is known to Behari as the furrow is known to the rabbit. I will find them. Leave it to Behari. The hound does not track the deer, the weasel the wild fowl with

such skill as does Behari track that gypsy who crosses his will.

"Tiens!" He smote his chest a mighty blow. "It is a plot! A vile plot, and there are so few days to thwart it."

"So—so few days." Florence's heart was in her mouth. She feared the worst for her comrade.

"I speak," he said in a changed voice, "of that which you cannot know."

"When do you go?" asked Madame.

"When do we go?" The man glared at her. "At once!"

"Where?"

"Who knows? Where does the hound go when the hare is loosed? Where the hare goes. Is it not so? So we will go. And you? Will you go with Behari?"

"Yes! Yes!" Florence sprang forward eagerly.

"No! No!" Madame pulled her back. "It is not best."

"Here," she said, emptying her purse, "is money. They who travel far and fast need coin."

Behari understood and smiled.

"As for us," Madame continued, "we will be at the Hotel Wagram on the Rue de Rivoli. Any message will reach us there. Is there anything else we can do?"

"Nothing. You may leave all to Behari."

"Then," said Florence, stepping forward and offering her hand, "we thank you!"

Behari took the hand and held it for a moment in his iron grip while he looked the girl over from head to toe. His keen eyes shone with unfeigned joy as he took in her stalwart form, her shapely arms, her full rosy cheeks.

"You," he said with a touch of the grand air, "should have been born and reared in a gypsy caravan."

At that, he dropped her hand, made a low bow, then went about the task of dismantling his forge.

CHAPTER XXI

A BEAUTIFUL PRISON

THE JOURNEY of the motorized gypsy van was not at an end. Daylight had come, yet the van rolled on. For a full hour the two girls lay looking at one another in enforced silence, for both were gagged.

To Betty the realization that her traveling companion was none other than her guide through the Paris Opera came as a distinct relief. On that memorable day this girl had proven herself so capable, her knowledge of things was so great that Betty found herself believing in her implicitly. "She is capable of finding her way out of any situation, no matter how difficult," she told herself with fresh built hope.

As for the blonde girl, she managed to smile with her eyes, if not with her bound lips. She still wore the long, red gown. Her mask had been torn away. Protruding from beneath the

gown, close to her chin, was a bit of cloth of a different hue.

"The gypsy shawl," Betty thought. "She still has it." Strangely enough, she derived much comfort from this realization.

So they rumbled on. The road became more uneven. They had apparently arrived at some remote spot where traffic was not great.

"They are taking us to some secluded spot," Betty told herself. "And then?" She shuddered. Recalling her resolve not to allow herself to be overmuch frightened, she forced her mind into other channels.

"The mind," she thought, following the familiar words of a great master, "is its own place. It can make a Heaven of Hell; a Hell of Heaven."

She set herself wondering about her traveling companion. Was she really a gypsy? If so, why had she wept at the steps of the ruined chateau?

"Perhaps," she told herself, "someone once lived there who was very kind to her. Enduring friendships between gypsies and other people are not uncommon. Some gypsies have become

famous musicians, and as such have been quite welcome at the courts of kings."

"But where is her bear?" she asked herself quite suddenly. To this question she could form no answer.

The road grew rougher and steeper. From time to time the motor labored hard to make a grade. Then the breaks would scream as they moved down a steep incline.

They had just arrived at the bottom of a hill when they came to a sudden halt.

"Another town," Betty thought. "We will not be here long."

In this she was at least partly wrong. The driver climbed down from his place and went stamping away.

"If only I could make a noise, attract someone," she thought to herself. She made a desperate effort to bump her head against the side of the van. When she at last succeeded she met with disappointment. That those who rode in this van at night might sleep in peace, the walls had been padded.

The blonde girl took little notice of all this.

Was she too weary to care, or did she realize the futility of any attempt at alarm or escape? Betty could not tell. All she knew was that more than half the time her eyes were closed as if in sleep, and that she did not move at all.

"What a strange world it is," she thought.

Again the van moved on. From that time until the journey came to an end, the road grew rougher and steeper. In time they were so shaken about that Betty found herself thrown against her traveling companion. For a moment their cheeks touched. The blonde girl smiled. Then, by a second jolt, they were thrown apart.

Needless to say, Betty was not sorry when once more the van came to a standstill.

This time the two men on the seat dismounted. One of them, coming to the door, unlocked and threw it open.

Stepping into the van, he first untied the gags that had sealed the girls' lips, then cut their bonds.

He next pointed to the back of the van. The blonde girl attempted to rise, but fell back. Her limbs were too stiff for immediate use.

Profiting by her example, Betty slid toward the door. Arrived there, she allowed her feet to dangle free until circulation was restored. Then she stood up and looked about her. She was joined by the blonde girl. Strangely enough, their captors had retired a distance down the road.

As Betty looked to her right her head swam. She was looking two hundred feet down over a sheer precipice.

Turning her gaze quickly away, she looked at the side of the mountain. There, perched on a sort of rocky shelf, was what appeared to be a Swiss chalet; at least she had seen pictures of buildings named in this manner. A broad, low building with eaves that protruded far out over its walls of stone, as it stood there bathed in sunlight, it appeared to speak of rest and peace.

"Come," said the blonde girl. She limped painfully as she led the way toward the house.

"Come," Betty whispered to herself. "That is the first word I ever heard her say. She said it at the door of the Opera. Now she says it again, but under what strangely different circumstances!

I only hope she knows the way out now, as she did then."

The place they entered was strange, quaint, fascinating. There was but one room. A broad, high room with beamed ceilings, it might have made a setting for one of Scott's novels. At the back was a huge fireplace with massive, wide-spreading andirons. Over the place where there should have been a fire a copper kettle hung on a crane. The fire was laid but not lighted. Shavings, small wood, and greater logs lay in place.

"Boo!" said Betty. "How cold it is here! I wonder if we dare light the fire."

"We dare do anything we choose." The blonde girl smiled. "Only we had better not try to pass down the road. We will not be able."

"We—we are prisoners?" The thought gave Betty a sinking feeling.

The girl nodded her head.

"For how long?"

The blonde girl shook her head. "Who can say?"

On the mantel above the fireplace was a box of matches. Betty lighted a shaving. It flared up.

Other shavings caught. The flames spread. Soon the flames were leaping high. Seated in broad leather bottomed chairs before this great fire that laughed and crackled as it roared up the chimney's broad mouth, they found a strange charm in it all.

"This," said Betty, "is our prison. And what an adorable prison!" Her tone was almost gay.

It was indeed a wonderful place. The walls, ancient and brown, supported massive rafters on which might still be seen the marks of a woodsman's axe. On the walls hung pictures, oil paintings. Artists of no mean ability had done them. One showed the snow white peak of a great mountain. Another was a picture of a girl, a goat herder of the Alps, going to her work with the morning sunshine on her face and the light of joy in her eye. There were others. As Betty looked at them she told herself that here was opportunity for hours of study.

In one corner of the room was a great cupboard filled with copper pots and pans and dishes of heavy stoneware. The lower part of the cupboard was stocked with food. Canned, dried and

preserved meats, vegetables and fruits were here.

"At least we will not starve," said Betty.

"Nor lack for place to sleep," said the blonde girl with a sigh. She had fixed a longing gaze upon a huge four-poster bed in the opposite corner. This elaborately carved bed was piled high with rough blankets.

"Tell you what," said Betty, sensing the girl's utter weariness, "you curl up under those blankets and sleep. I will keep watch."

For a time the girl demurred. Sheer weariness after a day of wild dancing and a night without rest, at last broke down her resistance. She crept beneath the warm blankets and was soon fast asleep.

Left to herself, Betty prowled about the place. In a cupboard beside the fireplace she found a painter's palette, many tubes of paint, and a great number of brushes.

"Wish I could use you as someone else has," she sighed. "Wonder if gypsies ever are painters. Some are fine musicians. But painters?" Here was a fresh mystery. Was this a gypsy cabin? Or did it belong to some painter? "If it belongs

to someone else," she told herself with a thrill, "he will soon return for his summer here."

She moved to the great shelves that held their food supply.

"Dried beans, bacon, a ham, dried peaches, beans in cans," she said to herself. "Some preserves and candied fruits, coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, salt, flour, spices. Any amount of food. We won't starve."

Once more she sat down by the fire. With chin cupped in hands, she sat there thinking. They had come a long way that night; were in the mountains now. What mountains? Might be the Alps, Switzerland. She had a vague sort of notion that a part of the Alpine range was in France. There were mountains between France and Spain. What were they called?

"Be strange to find oneself in mountains and not so much as know their names," she told herself.

"But then, this whole affair is strange. Why did they kidnap me? Revenge perhaps, or hope of ransom? And this blonde girl? Who could guess why they have taken her?"

In her mind she ran over the occasions on which she and Florence had seen the blonde girl on the lonely hill road, before the ruined chateau, in the Opera, dancing with a bear at the street fair.

"Is she a gypsy?" she asked herself for the hundredth time. "And where is her bear?" she murmured aloud.

* * * * *

The seat in the horse-drawn van of Behari, the gypsy blacksmith, was broad and deep. The blonde girl's bear, like some great dog, was seated beside Behari. And Behari was circling Paris. Pausing now and then to ask a question, he drove tirelessly on. Once again, this time in a wider circle, he began his quest. He had not gone far before, on coming to a dingy little inn, he halted to dismount and enter.

He left this place in great haste. Lashing his horses into a furious gallop, he went rattling away. No longer circling, he followed a course that would ere the sun set bring him far from Paris. Behari, the gypsy smith and human hound among wonders, had got his scent. He

would not pause, save to rest his steeds, until the quarry had been run down. And then? Behari's arms were like iron bands. Once with bare hands he had broken the neck of a ox that had attacked a gypsy child.

For a time, fired by who knows what mad passion, Bahari drove furiously. When his horses were flecked with foam, appearing to realize the futility of great haste on what was likely to prove a long journey, he slowed his team down to a steady trot and so made his way steadily onward over the road that had seen a mysterious motorized gypsy van pass in the night.

* * * * *

When Betty had completed her inspection of the cabin, she stole a glance at the sleeping girl. Then, tiptoeing to the door, she opened it.

The view that met her eye as she stood there was dazzling. Close at hand two apple trees in full bloom cast their fragrance to the air. Some little distance farther up and across the gorge, dark jagged rocks loomed like the wall of some giant's castle. And far, far away, most gorgeous of all, its crest gleaming like a diamond against

a cloth of faultless blue, a towering mountain loomed.

"This," she told herself, "is a valley of the Alps. How terrible to look upon the most magnificent view in the world and to realize at the same time that you are a prisoner with no knowledge of what your future may be!"

For a time she stood there motionless, drinking in the beauty of it all. Then, turning toward the cabin, she exclaimed with much feeling, "A prison, yet the most beautiful prison in the world!"

CHAPTER XXII

SCREAMING ICE

DARKNESS found the two girls still in the cabin at the edge of the rocky valley. Save for a short wandering trip to the blossoming apple trees and to the road for a look at the statuesque sentinel who held them prisoner, they had not left it that day.

After the blonde girl, Betty had taken her turn at three winks of sleep. In mid-afternoon they had eaten a cold lunch of crackers and Swiss cheese. Darkness came all to soon.

There was, they had discovered, a smaller chateau lower down. It was fair to suppose that their captors, who showed no interest in them save that they might not escape, would occupy this other cabin and would not molest them. Taking no chances, as night fell they dropped the heavy bar across the massive door.

"Nothing but an axe or sledge hammer could

batter it down," said Betty, giving the door a shake.

"Never fear," said the blonde girl. "Here there is no one save those two. And they will not molest us. They have orders from Panna. Never doubt that."

"Who is Panna?"

"Do you not know?" the blonde girl asked in surprise. "She is that terrible one. See. I took this from her!" She shook out the folds of the beautiful crimson shawl, and laughed a low musical laugh. "You have seen. You were there.

"She wishes the shawl. More than all else she would have it. But no! No! Never! Never!" Suddenly her tones grew fierce. "She shall not take it. Indeed she shall not!

"Unless," she spoke more slowly, "unless she should come here. And of course she will come." Once more her voice was high pitched and shrill. "But she shall not have it. It is a plot. She shall not!"

"We will bar the door," said Betty. "We will not let her in."

"It will do no good. You do not know how ter-

rible that one is. She is black, and terrible. She is Panna."

"And who," said Betty, "are you?"

"I?" The girl's voice changed. "They call me *le petite* Jeanne. It is enough. *Petite* Jeanne."

"All right, *petite* Jeanne," Betty laughed. "Since we cannot leave this place, we must be happy here. Let's get up a fine dinner."

This they did. Jeanne prepared a strange dish of meat and cheese that was delicious. Betty contributed cocoa, pudding, and vegetables. What more could they ask?

For a long time after that they sat before the fire watching the sparkle and glow of dying coals. Then, as the chill night air came creeping in upon them, having decided that a watch was useless, they crept together beneath the blankets and waited sleep.

"She will come," Jeanne said sleepily. "More than all else she wishes the shawl. Panna will come. We must escape. They do not guard the pass above. Perhaps they think it impossible that we go up and up and away. Perhaps they are right. There will be glaciers and gleaming

snows. But who knows that we may not pass?"

"Shall we try it to-morrow?" asked Betty.

"To-morrow we will try."

After that, save for the whisper of breezes about the corner of the chalet, there was silence. And they slept.

Dawn found them creeping stealthily forth from the cabin. On their backs they carried packs; a supply of food and a blanket for each. They had drawn heavy woolen socks, found in the cabin, over their shoes; this to protect their feet from the ice of the glacier.

They escaped unnoticed from the cabin. Soon a bend in the rugged trail hid them from view. Still up, up, up they climbed. The road soon became little more than a trail, then disappeared altogether. Still with a rocky ridge at their left, a gorge yawning to their right, they struggled on.

Snowbanks gleamed before them. They often sank to their knees in snow. But they crossed the snow, to struggle on.

Once, as they paused to rest, there came to their ears a sound as of thunder, yet the sky was clear. There was not a cloud.

"It is a snowslide," said Jeanne, devoutly crossing herself. "It is grand—and most terrible of all. If we are before it, we are swept away, buried deep! We are never found again. Never! Never! Come. Let us go on."

Then came the glacier. Rounding a rocky ridge, they found it glistening before them. A recent landslide had blocked the slope they had been following. Only one way was left to them: to cross that glistening field of ice.

"Come," said Jeanne. "Beyond is a narrow valley. By crossing a ridge, we may go to the lowlands. Then, once more we will be free."

So they started. The ice was treacherous. Many times Betty slipped and would have fallen but for the strong hand of her companion.

Then Jeanne, betrayed by a crumbling pinnacle of ice, fell upon a knee. When she rose the knee was cut and bleeding but she uttered no words of complaint.

"Come," she said, and still led the way.

From time to time as they moved forward, there sounded out screams and deep groans as of giants in mortal agony.

"It is the ice. It moves ever so slowly," said Jeanne.

With knees all atremble, Betty looked toward the valley. They were getting nearer to it. Hope rose high.

Again came a scream. This time louder and more terrifying than before, it was echoed from hilltop to hilltop. The very ice trembled beneath their feet. The next instant, directly before them, there appeared a yawning chasm of blue.

"Come back!" Jeanne cried. "It is the god of eternal snows. He is angry. He is cracking the ice. We may not pass."

Turning, they made their way in silence back over the treacherous glacier.

Betty heaved a sigh of relief as her foot once more touched solid earth.

"We must find some other way," said Jeanne, dropping upon the ground to bathe her lacerated knee with ice water, then to bind it with her handkerchief.

Sadly they wended their way back to the cabin. Arrived there, they found the place all in order and a fire ready laid on the hearth.

"They knew we were gone," said Betty, "but they did not follow."

"They were sure we must come back," said Jeanne. "It is kind that they have built us a fire."

As she bent over to light the fire, Betty realized for the first time that this strange young lady was not the child she had thought her. "She is very tiny," she told herself, "but she is much older than I." In this she found much comfort. "For," she told herself, "if she is older she has learned much from living. She will yet find us a way to escape."

"Come," said Jeanne, presently. "I am famished. We must eat." She mixed up a thick soup from dried vegetables and things out of cans that was strange and delicious. Betty filled her bowl again and yet again. Then, with the touch of mountain breezes and the burn of mountain sun still on her cheek, she sat down by the fire to doze and dream.

"No!" She was wakened from this dream by the voice of petite Jeanne. "No, I am not a gypsy. God forbid! Though not all gypsies are like that

terrible Panna. Some of them are very, very good."

She spoke as if a question had been asked, as indeed it had. Several days before in the Opera, Betty recalled, she had said to the girl, "Are you a gypsy?" Now the answer was coming. At once, sensing a story, she was all attention.

CHAPTER XXIII

PETITE JEANNE'S STORY

"YOU WILL say," began the little blonde girl, "that perhaps after all I am a gypsy when I tell you that truly I do not know who my father and mother were. But I do not think so. Gypsies do not have blonde hair. Their eyes are not blue.

"You have seen the ruined chateau close to that village where Joan of Arc was born?"

Betty nodded.

"Your companion has seen me weeping there. There is reason. That chateau, until my twelfth birthday, was my home. I was an adopted child. But we were very happy. What if your home is an adopted one? It may be a happy one all the same. And what does one not give for a home? There are great edifices in the world, churches, cathedrals, art museums, the most wonderful Opera which you and I have seen with our own

eyes. But what are these beside a home? Home! That is the place you love!"

"I know," said Betty. Her tone was low and solemn.

"You have had a home, a very grand home?" Jeanne asked.

"My childhood home," said Betty, "was very large. You would not call it grand nor beautiful. It was only a great ugly old brick building where men and women toiled long hours over the business of making cheap dresses, coats and suits. It stood on the banks of the most despised river in the world. My father ran the boilers that kept those toilers warm. It was not a grand home, nor a beautiful river. But I loved them both. For one was my home and the other the only river I have ever known."

"Ah, you have the most grand spirit. How easy to love such a one." The blonde girl fixed her great eyes on Betty.

"But you are not rich?" she said quite suddenly.

"No! No! Far from that!"

"Then there will be no ransom?"

"Ransom?" said Betty.

"That horrible one, Panna, will demand from you a ransom," Jeanne replied. "From me," she shrugged, "she will demand the shawl."

"We must find some way of escape," said Betty. "I have rich friends. They could pay a ransom, and would. But they must not be made to do so."

"And you," said Jeanne, "are you not greatly frightened by all these strange happenings?"

"Yes," replied Betty, "I could easily be frightened. "But what good could that possibly do?"

"You are young; much younger than I. How is it that you can so control your fears?"

"It is not years that give one age." Betty's tone was thoughtful. "My father has often told me that. It is experience. One does not live by the banks of a river in one of America's greatest cities without seeing much. I have seen men drown, and have saved others from drowning. I have heard the pop-pop-pop of guns at night and have known that men were not shooting at stone walls. Experience has taught me not to be afraid.

"But here to-night," she demanded, "what is

there to fear? The bar at the door is strong. The windows are small and high. This, why this seems one of the coziest spots I have ever known.

"If only we might have come under different circumstances," she sighed. "The Alps," she said slowly. "Who has not dreamed of them? We are in the Alps, are we not?"

"Yes, these are the Alps," said Jeanne. "But what is this spot? This I cannot tell. As for me, I have lived in the Alps. Six years I have lived there. Those, too, were happy days. It was there that I found my bear."

"You raised him from a cub?"

"No." The girl laughed. "He was full grown when he came to me."

"But was he not wild? Dangerous?" Betty's eyes went wide.

"No." The girl's laugh was low and sweet. "He was not dangerous. No! No! Not at all! He was—

"But I must begin at the right place." She broke off to throw some wood upon the fire.

As if to furnish a proper setting for an exciting and beautiful story, the fire burst forth into full

blaze, lighting the whole cabin as if it were day.

"We were very happy," the girl began musingly. "Very happy in that ancient chateau that is so in ruins now. My step-father and mother were all to me that parents could be. They were of an old and respected family. My step-father was a fruit merchant. He purchased apples, pears and grapes from the village people of the hill country, and took them to Paris.

"Ah, the long, beautiful rides I have had with him!" She breathed softly. "The sunsets were more gorgeous when he was with me. The stars shone more brightly at night.

"Such a beautiful home it was, that ancient chateau. A garden filled with flowers and fruit trees. A wall about it all so high that no one could see if you wished to have a beautifully secret time with your friends.

"Believe me, the world was never half so gay as then. The brooks never sparkled so brightly, the trees were never so green, nor the flowers so pink and red and blue as in those sweet days of my childhood. For I had a home, Mademoiselle, a home!"

The girl ceased speaking to stare moodily at the fire. As they sat there in silence the bright flare of flames died to a dull glow that seemed to speak of change, of darkness and night.

"Then," said the girl quite abruptly as if she wished to be through at once, "then came the terrible war!

"My father bought no more fruit. Our garden was neglected. He went away, looking very sad. He wore the uniform of an officer. He never returned. The terrible, terrible war!

"Then came that night, that most terrible night! The beautiful old chateau was bombed from the air. It fell in ruins. And beneath those ruins was my mother—dead!"

"I was saved." The girl gave the fire a prod with a stick. She threw on fresh fuel. It flared anew.

"I, Mademoiselle, was saved from death. They sent me to live with my father's sister in the Swiss Alps. There I grew up like a wild thing among goats, the cows, and the rough, kindly Swiss people.

"One winter night, when it was dark and

stormy, a man knocked at our door. He carried a violin and led a pet bear. He was a traveling performer. I was not afraid of the bear. I had seen such bears before. Instead, I played with him. He was as clumsy and kind as a big puppy dog.

"Next day the sun was bright. The man and the bear started over the mountain pass. The man was never seen again. He was lost in the snow, they said. That night something banged against the door. It was the bear. He had returned, returned to play with me.

"Men went out to search for the stranger. It was no use. He was gone. The bear was mine.

"That spring, when the little white Alpine flowers were all in bloom, my old Aunt was taken away to sunny lands where there is never ice and snow.

"They buried her on the hillside. And I was alone, alone with my bear.

"I was sixteen then, old enough to keep my own house and herd the goats that were left me.

"But what would you? I was lonely. A gypsy named Behari came along. He camped on the

bit of green before my doorstep. He was a good gypsy. For you must know, Mademoiselle, that there are good and bad gypsies. Behari is a good gypsy. He loves his wife and his fine daughter, who is younger than I. He is kind to all.

"'You have a bear,' he said to me. *'Tiens!* What a treasure! Come away to the spring fairs with us. I will teach you to dance with the bear. The people will give you many coins. You will live well. Come! I will teach you to dance the Tanana!'

"Well, what would you? I was young. I was lonesome. The roads that led away seemed to beckon. I longed for the sunny hills of France. I gave my goats to those who had been kind to me. I went. And, Mademoiselle, I have no regrets. I have become a wanderer. And yet, with those about you who are kind, where could one find a sweeter life? At times I am with Behari and his beautiful family. Again I have a little room in Paris where all the artists are.

"And then," she sighed, "the great opportunity came. There was a contest for dancers. We, my

bear and I, won the contest. The great reward is to come very soon. And here I am—a prisoner!

"She did it!" Jeanne rose to pace the floor. "That terrible Panna did it. She wanted the honor for a member of her tribe, a very beautiful dancer. But she had no gypsy shawl. It was the shawl. It holds a charm. Three times she took it from me, this terrible Panna. Three times I have it back. And now she holds me prisoner. And the reward, the most beautiful opportunity that comes but once in a long, long life. What of that? We must escape, Mademoiselle!" Jeanne's voice rose to a high pitch. "We must! We must!

"But how?" She slumped down in her chair, a picture of woe.

For a long time they did not speak. Betty piled the fire high, then put the kettle on to boil for hot chocolate.

Only when the chocolate was poured and they sat by the blazing fire, did she hazard a question.

"The shawl?" she said. "It is your own?"

The girl nodded. "My father bought it from the gypsies, long ago. He said then it cost much money and carried a charm with it."

"Now you have the shawl," Betty smiled, "the charm is not lost. We will find a way out. There will be no ransom paid to this Panna for me. You will yet have your reward. Will you believe this?"

"You are so very, very kind!" said Jeanne, laying a hand on Betty's own. "Yes, I do believe."

CHAPTER XXIV

A CURIOUS DISCOVERY

JUST as the two girls were thinking of sleep, a great storm came rushing down from the high Alps. It burst with such sudden fury upon the cabin that their fire, which had died to a mass of dull coals, came to fierce and sudden life to go roaring up the chimney.

It banged at the door, this storm. It set raindrops beating like hail against the window pane. Had not some wise Swiss, in finishing the place, loaded down the roof with heavy rocks, the very roof boards might have been torn from over their heads. As it was, an occasional small rock, loosened by the impact of the storm, went rolling and bumping down to fling into the infinity of night and storm that lay far below.

Betty shuddered. But Jeanne laughed. She knew these Alpine storms and loved them.

"If only we had a friend as big and strong as

nature to fight our battles," she said with a smile. "What a wonderful life we should live!"

Someone else felt the impact of that storm. A lone driver, on the seat of a gypsy van, urging his horses on into the night, first turned up his coat collar, then realizing that this was no ordinary squall to be weathered in a half hour, swung his van in at a convenient camping spot, wheeled his horses about and dismounting quickly unhitched them and stripped the harness from their backs.

This man was Behari. A horse-driven caravan cannot compete with one driven by steel and gas. Yet Behari's horses were strong; the best in France. Behari was a diligent and trusted smith. He mended wagons, plows and harrows, and shod the peasants' horses. He had money, had Behari the gypsy. And money brings us what we wish. Behari wished fine horses. He had them. When he left Paris they were fresh and eager for the road. Tireless they were, of a strong, wild strain. By traveling all day and a better part of the night he had covered many miles.

As he had driven into the face of the on-coming storm, his family had slept in the back of the van.

With them slept Jeanne's bear. Indeed, one of Behari's children slept with her head on the bear's shoulder. Behari's children loved the bear.

As Behari halted his van and prepared to weather the storm, the bear rose and stretched himself. Putting out a huge paw, he pushed open the door at the back of the van. Stepping carefully that he might not disturb the sleepers, he left the van to go smelling about the ground.

The night was dark. Behari did not see the bear. He crept into the van. Finding the warm spot vacated by the bear, he curled wearily up for sleep.

"We are nearing the spot," he mumbled low to himself. "To-morrow we will be there. And then—"

At that he fell asleep.

But the bear slept no more that night. Instead, with head hung low, stopping now and then to sniff at the road, he plodded doggedly on in the face of the storm. The road he took was that which Behari would have followed had not the storm come sweeping down upon them. That trail

led to the high Alps. The night was not too dark nor the storm too fierce for the bear. He plodded on and on into the night.

* * * * *

In the meantime, in Paris, Florence led an unhappy life. She haunted the police stations to no purpose. No word came to her from the missing Betty. When nothing was to be done she tried in vain to become interested in Paris. She wandered through the art galleries, strolled the public parks and visited the Latin Quarter. She even walked up the Avenue de L'Opera to stand before the magnificent edifice which had so charmed her lost friend. All this was to no purpose. With the disappearance of Betty, joy had left Paris.

"Think," she said to Madame, "think if, in the end, we must go back to America without her!"

"Never! Never!" cried Madame. "We shall find her, never fear. You forget Behari. He will find her."

"But Behari is only a gypsy."

"Ah!" Madame's tone was full of scorn.

"Only a gypsy! A very great and brave gypsy! Have I not always told you that these wanderers possess extraordinary powers? How then? If they are with you, then they are with you indeed. And with them, you will win."

In their suite at the Hotel Wagram was one strange object. It stood upon Florence's dressing table; a black bottle labeled "whiskey." Curious indeed that it should be here, for Florence did not so much as take a sip of wine with her dinner, and Madame only on special occasions. As for whisky, "Oh, never!"

This bottle was the one with which Florence had threatened to demolish the gypsy woman's evil face should she advance a step there in the tent on the Avenue.

She had carried it from the tent without knowing that she did so. Finding herself still in possession of it when the affair was over, she had wrapped it in a newspaper and carried it to their hotel. So there it stood on her dressing table.

In a happy moment as she stood looking at this bottle a thought struck Florence all of a heap. Hurrying to her traveling bag, she brought

forth an old and faded paper on which were several circular marks made by the resting of some object upon it for a long time. It had, you will recall, been taken from the shelf in the buried dugout looted by the gypsies.

After spreading the paper on the floor, she took the bottle by the neck and placed it carefully over one of the circles. The next instant an exclamation escaped her lips.

"See!" she cried to Madame. "Come here and see! The bottle I took from the gypsy tent just fits the marks on the paper. There were many bottles in that tent. And those bottles," she cried triumphantly, "were the loot they took from the dugout. They have not so much as seen the art treasure and the statue of gold. It is still hidden somewhere on the hillside. Won't Patrick be glad to know that he was right! How I should like to go and tell him at once."

"I can see no reason why you should not," said Madame, rejoicing to see her companion taking a genuine interest in something at last. "There is no duty here that I cannot perform. It may be that with Patrick's aid you may yet find the

art treasure. And what a great blessing this would be!"

"I will go on the morning train," said Florence.

That was the night that the storm came swooping down from the high Alps. It did not reach Paris nor Morey, where Patrick still doggedly pursued his search for rat holes. In other quarters, however, it quite changed the even tenor of many lives.

CHAPTER XXV

THE AVALANCHE

MORNING found the mountains glistening in all their glory after a night of storm. Never was the air so clear, the sky so blue, the rocks so black nor the snowcaps so white as now. The wind which had roared and howled about the little Swiss chalet had died to a murmur and the murmur had gone whispering away into the hills. Save for the great rush of waters in the river far below, a hush hung over all.

"It is so still it frightens me," said Jeanne. "It is at such times as this that land slips and snow slides, loosened perhaps by the sound of a voice, come thundering down from the heights." With wrinkled brow, she gazed up and up to the dizzy heights far above them.

"Come," said Betty. "Let's go down the road a little way. Let us see if our guards are still there."

"Never fear," said Jeanne. "They are there. They have orders from one who is a great power."

They had gone but a few steps when there struck to their ears sounds of some commotion.

"Come!" said Jeanne, seizing her companion's hand and dragging her forward. "Something dreadful is about to happen. Who can tell?"

She broke short off to stand staring. They had rounded the curve, and there directly before them were two men battling with a bear.

A man lifted an axe to split the bears head. A deft stroke from the bear sent the axe spinning into the floods far below. One more stroke, and the man followed the axe, over the precipice. Fortunately for him, he was not as light as the axe. He caught on the edge, hung there for an instant, dropped ten feet, then landed safely on a narrow ledge, ten feet below.

"Come!" cried Jeanne. "It is our chance. This is my bear. He is our deliverer. Now we shall escape."

As they sprang forward there was no one to dispute their passing. The second guard, frightened quite out of his wits by the bear's skill, was

glad enough to make his escape to his lodge and slam the door behind him.

Expecting the bear and Betty to follow, the little French girl went racing down the trail.

Betty followed to the best of her ability. She was not as agile as her companion, but did as well as she could.

As for the bear, he did not venture to move from the spot where he stood. Like one left on guard, he moved his head expectantly first toward the precipice whence one enemy had disappeared, then toward the cabin in which the other was hiding.

"Now, now we shall be saved!" panted Jeanne, slowing up at last to allow Betty to catch up.

She spoke too soon, for out from a rock cavity just behind them appeared a dark face and a pair of black angry eyes.

"Panna!" cried Jeanne. "Run! Run now for your life!"

Then such a race as there was. Down a winding way, up a slight slope, down again, over rocks, across small rushing streams; on and on they sped.

But what was the chance? They were weary. The sinewy gypsy woman was fresh. Inspired by a great hatred, she gained on them step by step.

Now Betty heard the grinding plop-plop of her heavy shoes, and now seemed to catch the sense of her hot breath on her neck, and now she was ready to give up in despair.

But what was this? From somewhere high up, afar off came a sullen roar.

"An avalanche! A landslide!" Jeanne screamed. "Run! Run!"

Strangely enough, inspired by this fresh terror, Betty found herself in possession of fresh power. She ran as never before. And as she ran, the thunder increased, doubling and re doubling, its terror filled the air. All the valley, all the world, seemed to become a part of its very being.

She was madly stumbling forward, expecting every moment to be crushed beneath mountains of rock, soil and snow, when a hand seized her and dragged her to one side.

It was Jeanne. They had reached a haven of

refuge, a narrow tunnel cut through the rocks. Nothing could harm them here.

"Oh!" panted Betty, quite beside herself. "Oh! How—how terrible!"

"Look!" said Jeanne, standing with eyes transfixed, staring up the trail they had left.

The scene that followed will remain indelibly impressed upon Betty's sensitive brain.

The dark gypsy woman had not followed them. At sound of the approaching avalanche, she had turned and had fled back over the trail. Arrived at a shelving rock which offered protection, she had turned to look behind her.

In the meantime the bear, having lost interest in his adversaries, had turned to come looping down the trail. At the moment when Betty looked, all unconscious of catastrophe that threatened, the bear was trotting along in the very path of the thundering peril.

"Look!" screamed Jeanne. "Look at Panna!"

The gypsy woman, from her point of safety, was leaping up and down with joy and pointing at the bear who, still unconscious of danger, trotted on.

All this drama required but a moment's time for its enacting.

Then came the deafening crash of a million tons of snow, blotting out a trail and giving pause to an on-rushing river.

"Back!" screamed Jeanne. "Back!" She dragged Betty farther into the tunnel. Then, "Look! Look!"

The whole affair seemed over, when there came such a tug from nowhere that it seemed about to drag Betty from her place of safety. To her vast amazement, at that very instant Betty saw what appeared to be a miracle. With only the solid earth beneath her feet, and no visible power about her, Panna, the evil gypsy woman, suddenly rose twenty feet in air. Then, with a scream that was terrible to hear, she shot downward, not twenty feet, but two hundred feet over the precipice to sudden death on treacherous rocks and amid rushing torrents of water.

"It is the act of God!" said Jeanne, solemnly. "She was a wicked woman. Now she is gone."

"But what was it?" demanded Betty. "What did it?"

"It was the wind made by the avalanche when it came to rest. It is very, very dangerous."

"The bear?" said Betty.

"Gone. Buried deep. It is God's will," said Jeanne, sadly. "Come. Now we are free. Let us go down. Somewhere in the valley below there are honest people who will give us shelter."

Ten minutes passed in silence as they made their way down the mountainside. Then of a sudden the French girl stopped short to turn about and stare.

"It is!" she cried. "Now may the good God be praised! It is a miracle! He is safe! My bear! My own beloved one!"

She went racing back over the trail. There, a moment later, Betty found her weeping tears of joy and hugging the bear's shaggy neck.

"He is here!" she exclaimed. "He is safe!"

It was true. How had it happened? Had he hugged a narrow ledge, then crept out through a shallow channel left by the avalanche? The answer to this question Betty will never know. It was enough that he was safe and Jeanne was happy.

CHAPTER XXVI

DIGGING FOR TREASURE

TWO HOURS of tramping by the girls and their trained bear brought them to a broad valley that was dotted here and there with red roofed cottages. And there they met Behari and his van.

What a joyous meeting it was! In the extravagantly emotional way of the French, Jeanne threw her arms about the neck of the stalwart wanderer and hugged him tight.

Then, releasing him, she exclaimed, "Oh, but you must meet my friend—from America."

Behari stretched out a grimy hand. Betty had never before experienced such a vice-like grasp.

"But where is Panna?" Behari demanded as a thundercloud formed on his brow. "How is it that you have escaped?"

"It was the hand of God," said the French girl. "Panna is no more."

Seating herself on the grassy bank beside the road, Jeanne told their story.

"And now," she exclaimed, springing up as the story was ended, "I must get back to Paris! At once! At once! Or is it too late?" Her voice suddenly lost its animation.

"No," said Behari, "there is yet time. We will drive fast to the nearest station. There you will take the train for Paris."

"And you?" He bent an enquiring gaze upon Betty.

"I—I will go with her," said Betty. "On—only, if there is time before the train I should like very much to get a message through to my friends in Paris."

"There may be time," said Behari. "We will drive like Jehu." And that, as you will know who have read your Bibles, was not profanity, but plain truth.

This Betty realized to the full as they went rattling, banging and bumping over the uneven road that led downward, and ever onward until they brought up with a flourish at the depot.

They arrived an hour before train time. Betty

got a message off at once. "Safe, sound, and among friends," it read. "Please reply."

A half hour later, as she drank coffee and munched dry black bread at a tiny inn, the answer was brought to her.

"Overcome with joy. Meet us at Morey." It was signed by Madame Strossor.

"Madame is marvelous," Betty said to Jeanne. "She has found out, beyond doubt, that we can meet more quickly at Morey than at Paris. So she and Florence are hurrying there now to meet me."

As she thought this through more carefully, intriguing questions arose in her mind. Had she analyzed the situation correctly? Or, was there some better reason for going to Morey? Had things been happening in Morey; wonderful things?

"I do hope so!" she told herself. "I hope Patrick has really found the statue of gold and has wired them the good news."

* * * * *

Things indeed were happening in Morey. Matters of great importance were transpiring.

But of the true sequence Betty could be expected to have no knowledge.

These events became in a curious way an apparently unimportant affair. On returning to the village and learning that Patrick had met with no success, Florence had gone for a walk in the forest on the hillside. There she had made the acquaintance of a small boy and a smaller dog. The small dog got up a small gray rabbit. From that time on, important events transpired in rather rapid succession.

Florence liked small boys and small dogs, so she hurried along after them. The rabbit did not appear to be much afraid of the small dog. He ran rather briskly for a time, then sat down to rest. When the little dog came puffing up he took to his heels again to repeat his performance.

The little French boy appeared to be certain that the dog would catch the rabbit. Florence was quite as sure he would not. But she loved the boy for his faith in that mite of a dog.

Matters came to a head with a suddenness that was startling. Apparently tiring of the sport, the rabbit attempted to put an end to it by leap-

ing down a rather large hole at the side of a great boulder.

The rabbit had misjudged the size and courage of the dog. Without a second's hesitation the dog went down the hole after him.

When Florence and the small boy arrived they found only a hole half hidden by a great rock.

The small boy dropped to the ground and held an ear to the hole. After a moment he arose. There was a worried look on his face. He said something in French.

Florence did not understand his words. She did not miss the meaning of his gesture. Dropping on her knees, she bent an ear to the hole.

"The little dog's in trouble," she told herself. She could hear piteous whining. "Stuck, probably. If he continues to stick, we'll have to get him out somehow."

She dropped to a seat on the leafy hillside. Five minutes passed; ten; fifteen, and no dog. Still the whining continued.

"Curious," Florence told herself. "Sounds as if he were in a hollow place—like a well. Have to dig him out, I guess." It did not occur to

her that the dog and rabbit had led her to a remarkable find.

She thought of Patrick and his shovel.

"He could help us," she told herself. "We'd dig him out with the shovel."

Standing up, she cupped her hands to let out a long, piercing,

"Who-hoo-e-e!"

"Who-hoo-e-e!" the hills echoed back.

Three times she repeated the call. The third time there came to her ears, faint and from far away, an answer.

Ten minutes later Patrick, with his shovel, was beside her.

The first words he uttered astonished her.

"Well, you've found it!" His eyes were big with joy and wonder.

"Found what?" demanded Florence. "We followed a small dog to a rabbit hole, and we've got to dig him out."

"Rabbit hole, my eye!" exclaimed Patrick. "The dugout's down there, and maybe the treasure. Here, stand aside. Let me at it."

Too astonished for an answer, too much over-

joyed at this fresh revelation to move, Florence stood there in silence until Patrick pushed her gently away and began to dig.

Patrick was handicapped in his digging because of his missing limb. Florence was not accustomed to using a shovel. They made slow work of it. But what with their own hope of treasure, and the little French boy's eager urge, they kept at it until, just as the sun was tinting the hilltops with gold, Patrick's shovel cut through. Five minutes later a cavity large enough to admit a man had been made.

"We have found a dugout," said Patrick. "Here's hopin'!"

At that moment they heard a call quite close at hand.

"That," said Florence, feeling her knees give way in her excitement, "sounds like Betty. But how could it be?"

It was, all the same. And Madame was with her. At a junction their trains had met. From this junction they had come on together. Not finding Florence in the village, they had come to the hills to seek her.

"And now," said Florence, to the excited Betty, "now for the grand moment! Perhaps," she added, rather uncertainly.

"But the place is dark!" said Betty with a shudder. "It may be a grave, as well as a dugout. And we have no light."

"Certainly have!" said Patrick, producing three fat tallow candles. "I've carried these for many a day for just such an occasion. I'll lead the way."

Lighting the candles, he gave one to Madame and offered one to Florence, who passed it on to Betty.

"Here's luck!" said Patrick. With that he disappeared into the dark cavity.

With a hand that trembled so violently that her light was in danger of being extinguished, Betty gripped her candle and followed on. The others, with the small boy at the rear, trooped after in silence.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SILVER SHIP

"IT'S THE very place!" Patrick's words sounded like a prayer said in a church.

They were in the one large, cement walled room of the dugout. "I remember it all. Who could forget?"

Betty was seized once more with a fit of shuddering. She could not overcome the notion that some brave soldier might have been trapped here and the place become his living grave.

She was frightened nearly out of her senses when something touched her ankle. But Florence laughed.

"It's the little dog!" she exclaimed. "The hero of the hour!

"Here, boy!" she said, picking up the dog. "Here's your pal, safe and sound."

The boy did not understand her words, but he did not need to. Folding his arms about his

small friend, he disappeared the way he had come.

As they passed from one room to another, however, they found only piles of rot that had been bedding, and several bars of red rust that had been rifles.

"And here," said Patrick, taking in a deep breath, "is the very room!"

With a gesture that was dramatic in the extreme, he swung his light into that last room.

"Oh! Oh!" breathed Florence.

"Wha—what is it?" Betty could not see.

"The treasure!" Florence's tone was deep and low. "The—the statue of gold!"

It was true. There, exactly as Patrick had described it, was the treasure, all untouched and unchanged, save for tarnish, over those long years.

When they had examined it all and exclaimed over it again and again, Patrick suddenly dropped on one knee to drag some objects out of a dark hole lower down.

"More treasure!" he breathed. "But not from the art museum. These came from some private house. A silver ship, a platter and two goblets

of gold. And these," he said, bowing low, "must go to the young ladies who did so much to bring this day to such a glorious close."

"Can—can we not return them to their owners?" Florence asked.

"Impossible, my dear," said Madame. "Ten years. Think! And think again how far they may have been carried. No! No! The art treasure must be returned to its place. These are for you and for Betty. See. Which will you have?"

"If—if you please," Betty replied excitedly, "that is, if Florence does not mind, I should like the silver ship. I will keep it in my room forever. A—a sort of symbol of all the ships I'd like to sail on round the world."

"You are very modest," said Madame. "Gold is much more precious metal."

"But it's not the value. It's the beauty and the thought a thing symbolizes that really counts," said Betty.

"Done!" said Florence. "I really am very fond of gold."

Four days later there was a great celebration

in the little French village that had been the birthplace of a celebrated artist. It was the day of the return of the long lost art treasure. Very early in the morning the road thronged with people coming to the great festival. Carts, automobiles, and vans came rumbling over the narrow roads. Yet not one of these was as important as one light high-wheeled cart to which was hitched a spotted pony. On the broad seat rode a prim Madame and a one-legged Irish soldier. In the back, on cushions, sat two American girls, and with them rode the treasure of art and the statue of gold.

It was a great day. They were met two miles from town by the entire village, a great throng. In triumph, amid shouts and songs, they were escorted to the desecrated museum.

There, after many speeches and a great deal of singing, the statues were placed just as they had been before the great and terrible war.

With solemn ceremony the Mayor appointed Patrick official custodian of the museum for the remainder of his life.

Then a rich feast was spread on the green and

the people enjoyed themselves as only French people can.

"How wonderful, and how perfectly beautiful it all is!" said Madame.

"Yes," said Betty. "It is worth all it cost and a great deal more."

The happy trio were present at one more festive occasion before they took the plane for London on their way home. They had returned to their Paris hotel for one more long look at that beautiful city when tickets for an entertainment to be held at the Opera were sent to them. With it came a brief note:

"You will come," it read. "You surely must. A grand surprise awaits you." It was signed, *Petite* Jeanne.

"What can she mean!" exclaimed Florence.

Betty thought she knew, but did not hazard a guess.

The entertainment was the "Drama of Charity," an amateur performance put on by various clubs and churches for the benefit of a children's hospital. The house was packed with the wealth and beauty of Paris.

"Such marvelous gowns!" Florence whispered to Betty as they took their places.

"And what shimmering jewels!" Betty answered.

This indeed was to be a gala night in the Opera.

Betty thought of that other time, when all the seats and boxes gloomed at her from the dark, and a pleasing thrill went tickling up her spine.

The curtain lifted. A boys' choir of two hundred voices sang as Betty believed no mortal beings had sung before.

"That," she whispered, "was Heavenly!"

"Yet it is not," she told herself. "The grand surprise, it will come later."

She thought the moment had arrived when the curtain lifted to reveal a grim old castle.

"The one; the very one!" she told herself, and expected at once to see Jeanne appear.

Instead, twenty girls dressed as flower maidens came dancing out to sing a song of spring and to end by tossing their flowers to the delighted audience.

Again the curtain fell. This time it rose al-

most at once. And there was *petite* Jeanne, with her gypsy shawl about her shoulders and her bear at her side, standing there smiling, unafraid.

As she began the slow rhythmic motion of the ancient gypsy dance, it appeared to take possession of her and she lost consciousness of the crowd, and danced without her bear as she had on that other rare occasion for Betty and Betty alone.

"She danced then for me," said Betty. "But now there is this vast audience. She has her shawl and her bear. Her great opportunity. This is her big hour; perhaps the greatest hour of all. This—" it came to her as a sudden surprise—"this is the grand reward of which she spoke."

She was to learn later that this was true. She was to be told how the Society for the Promotion of Happiness Among Children of the Poor had offered a prize to the wanderer who might offer the most perfect entertainment. The prize was a purse of five hundred francs. But the greatest prize of all was an opportunity to dance on the stage of the Opera.

Petite Jeanne was not a stranger to the Opera.

She had made friends with a guard of the place long before. The Opera was as well known to her as a peasant's home is to him. She had danced on that stage many times, but always when the house was dark. How often, oh how often she had longed to dance there when all the wealth, the beauty and wisdom of Paris was before her!

She had won the contest. The evil-minded gypsy woman had striven in vain to prevent her from being present at this time. She had not succeeded. So here was *petite* Jeanne, dancing as she had never danced before.

Betty's heart ached with joy as she watched, as she felt the breathless suspense and knew that her little friend was achieving a triumph.

The time came at last when the dance was at an end; when with a graceful whirl the girl sent bright shawl circling to the floor, to drop upon it.

Then how the walls of that ancient playhouse rang with applause! It rose and fell like the thunder of the surf on the sands. It followed petite Jeanne up the castle steps. It called to her through the thin walls of her make-believe world and brought her back.

As she reached the stage and bowed low, Betty could no longer suppress a joyous cry:

"*Petite* Jeanne! *Petite* Jeanne!"

And the throng, catching the name, took up the shout to make the walls echo with the words,

"*Petite* Jeanne! *Petite* Jeanne!"

"And now," said Betty an hour later as they rode to the hotel, "I do not wish to see another thing in France. I want that picture of dear little Jeanne to remain in my mind forever."

"To-morrow we will take the plane for London," said Madame.

And they did.

That was not the last Betty ever saw of petite Jeanne. The little French girl came to America. In America she met with fresh adventures. The story of these adventures will be found written down in our next book, which is called "Green Eyes."

THE END

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